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ABSTRACT

The six issues of this newsletter have the following themes: (1) home schooling, (2) promising practices, (3) parent advocacy, (4) the young gifted child, (5) "being out of sync," and (6) philosophy of giftedness. Major articles include the following: "Homeschooling for Gifted Primary Students" (Patricia Linehan); "Learning to Fly: A Home Schooling Retrospective" (Elye Alexander); "Promising Practices for Talented Children" (Ann Robinson); "Acceleration across the Pyramid" (Ellie Schatz); "The Quandary in the Question: 'What Is the Best School for the Gifted?'" (Ellen D. Fiedler); "Enlightened Advocacy: Developing a Vision for Life" (Joan Franklin Smutny); "Parent Advocacy: Nuts and Bolts--And Tools" (Dorothy Knopper); "How Parents Identify Giftedness in Young Children" (Barbara Louis); "Preschools for the Gifted: What To Look For" (Lisa Wright); "Are We Mislabeling Overexcitable Children?" (Sharon Lind); "Square Pegs in Round Holes: Gifted Kids Who Don't Fit In" (Ellen Fiedler); "Reexamining the Foundations of Giftedness" (Richard W. Ronvik); "Giftedness and 'The New Philosophy of Science'" (James H. Borland); and "Imposing Order on Chaos: A Theoretical Lexicon" (Martha J. Morelock). In addition, each issue contains regular features addressing parenting issues, instruction, issues related to the highly gifted, recommended books for gifted children, development of creativity, and current developments in gifted education. (DB)

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UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED®

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

September—October, 1992

Volume 5, Issue 1

Homeschooling for Gifted Primary Students

Patricia Linehan

Homeschooling is still considered a radical activity in America, but it is legal in one form or another in all states, and is the current educational process for approximately 400,000 or more children nationwide, with steadily increasing popularity (Ray, 1989). Although some families homeschool from kindergarten through high school quite successfully, with teenagers going on to enter prestigious colleges and universities, the majority of active homeschoolers are educating elementary children. The number of parents choosing to homeschool *gifted* children also appears to be on the rise. With federal and state funding cuts to gifted education programs in many areas, more and more parents will consider this alternative, particularly for their gifted primary children.

Why would homeschooling be an excellent alternative, particularly for the gifted primary age child?

1. Because truly advanced primary children are at considerable risk for loss of motivation and the development of underachievement patterns in the average public school classroom.

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Learning to Fly: A Homeschooling Retrospective

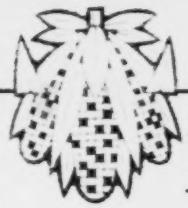
Elye Alexander

Cracking the Shell

Picture yourself in a bare, white room, small, cornerless and without enough air. No door offers access to the world beyond, no window shows a glimpse of other things; no carpet softens the hard floor, no art graces the encroaching walls. Without furniture, you shift from one posture to the next, all somehow uncomfortable in the cramped space. You have no telephone nor other means of being heard or answered. Even your own voice shouting, hollering your individuality out loud, results only in inward echoes. Your small supply of food slowly dwindles. It seems that there is nowhere to go; and yet, faintly, beyond the walls, you know—for when you are silent you can hear it—someone is singing.

It is suffocating and uncomfortable for a young bird, ready to hatch, to be trapped within its shell without room to stretch the life that moves inside it. It is equally unpleasant for a child to be trapped in an educational system that does not work. For a gifted child in rural Vermont, the outlook can seem particularly bleak, for it often appears that there is little that can be done, that there are few alternatives and no good ones. Small

(Continued on page 11)



FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends,

We welcome as a regular columnist, Dr. Lisa Wright, Director of the Leta Hollingworth Center for the Study and Education of the Gifted at Teachers College, Columbia University. One of the foremost researchers in early childhood development of the gifted, Lisa is taking over the "Bright Beginnings" column. In her first column, Lisa advises parents about how to keep **home portfolios** of their children's accomplishments. This is particularly important for homeschooling families, as is seen in Elye Alexander's article. Elye indicates that his family's careful record keeping, guided by Kathi Kearney, assisted him in gaining acceptance to Harvard University. A great big hug and thank you to Dr. Suzanne Perry, who was a regular columnist for us from our inception, first designing our "Hidden Gifted Learner" column, then taking on the "Bright Beginnings" column.

It may seem odd to start the school year with an issue on homeschooling, but the times demand that we examine thoroughly all of the available alternatives, and educators need to be aware of the growing number of families experimenting with homeschooling for at least part of their children's education. Elye's eloquent article, "Learning to Fly: A Homeschooling Retrospective," and Patricia Linehan's insightful "Homeschooling for Gifted Primary Students," will surely inspire many families of gifted children to consider homeschooling as a viable alternative in these harsh times of budget cuts and anti-gifted sentiment. Be prepared for a perceptual shift in regard to the issue of social adjustment of homeschoolers!

We have been fortunate to receive excellent articles from students like Elye about their own experiences, and we look forward to hearing from more gifted young people in the future. *Understanding Our Gifted* hopes to become the voice of parents, educators, researchers, psychologists, and students themselves, who can provide the inside view of giftedness. As Dee Lovecky reminds us in her column, the field has relied too long on eminent gifted adults as the prototype of giftedness, emphasizing product over process. She calls for a developmentally based model of gifted education focused on childhood. The cherished domains of childhood, such as "Dungeons and Dragons, joke collecting and telling, knowing every line of Monty Python..." bear little relationship to adult domains of achievement. Dee challenges current ideas with the question, "Is the value of a person only in the things one produces, or in who one is?"

Linda Silverman

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Deirdre V. Lovecky

HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants—Part II

It has been suggested that the problem with the concept of giftedness is that children with high intelligence scores, for example those in the Terman and Hollingworth studies, "didn't accomplish anything" as adults. That is, there were none who reached the eminence of a Darwin or Einstein. Thus, being of exceptionally high intelligence supposedly is not a sign of true giftedness. In current theories of giftedness, having an extraordinarily high degree of intelligence is often discounted, and other criteria are used instead, such as task commitment and creative production of concrete products in domains valued by society. Concrete products can be either end products, such as a song or report, or questions asked by the child and then answered by experimentation.

This type of gifted education focuses on eminent gifted adults to determine the set of skills important in teaching young gifted children. The main problem with doing this is that young children are not provided with what they really need from a developmental perspective. The very traits that point to exceptional intelligence (curiosity, immersion in material, high energy levels, and high needs for mental stimulation, complexity of material, and exploration without requiring products) often mean the child is focused, not on producing tangible products, but on investigation that has no more point than the sheer joy of learning about the world and one's place in it. For example, the 22-month-old child described by Feldman (1986) who learns almost a dozen foreign languages to solve the problem of whether there is a parent language can be seen from two perspectives: as a child who sets up a problem for himself and then solves it, that is, a good scientist, or as a small child exploring relationships. Since small children are focused on parents as primary factors in their existence, exploring if languages also have parents makes sense from a developmental framework.

In general, young gifted children waste large amounts of time on domains society values not at all: building Lego cities and having space wars with them, Dungeons and Dragons, joke collecting and telling, knowing every line of Monty Python, having an extensive knowledge of dinosaurs, TV commercials, Beatles and Grateful Dead songs, and knowing how to make an entire set of chain mail from old pull can tops. Knowing many of these subjects may lead gifted children to further exploration and questioning. For example, the child interested in making chain mail learns a great deal about medieval trades, and may become interested enough to learn more about The Middle Ages, but also may not.

In fact, once the child masters the techniques involved, interest in chain mail may disappear. It is the process of self-selection and exploration up to the point of vanishing interest that is important. For many highly intelligent children, the satisfaction comes from solving the puzzle in their mind, and there is no need apparent to them to produce an end product.

In gifted education, as well as in life, it is the existential issues that demand the attention of gifted children. Is the value of a person only in the things one produces, or in who one is? Are only final products important or is the intervening process of discovery, which may end in no product but satisfaction and joy, also important? Is it the destination that matters or is the trip itself of value? The child with a more existential and Eastern approach to life might argue for the journey.

Few gifted children will grow up to be geniuses or paradigm shifters. Most will grow up to hold jobs that require intelligence and creativity but they will not be recognized nor remembered even a hundred years from now. This is not because giftedness is not worth developing but because there is very little room in the world for massive change. Even major names like Einstein will be forgotten five centuries hence or their contributions thought quaint. How many people do we remember from the 1400's after all? The world is not static, it moves on and new giants arrive to build on the ideas of those before them. There are flashes of new insight, and new sciences and art forms are born. And then they become the establishment, and then they die. Meanwhile our gifted children are here today and deserve a more developmentally based model of gifted education.

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Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island, and a frequent author of articles on giftedness in children and adults.

Elizabeth Meckstroth

PARENTING

The Love Train

Here in Chicago, one of the "El" conductors welcomes passengers aboard "The Love Train." Ann's license plate is "JOYOUS." How can you use nourishing enthusiasm to package little moments in your lives and transform them to self-esteem building experiences?

Self-esteem is the foundation of looking good and feeling good, of being effective and productive, and of appreciating other people and ourselves. In operational terms, self-esteem includes autonomy, independence, and trust in our own way of making sense of the world (Clarke, 1978). It is **not** needing to hurt others to make ourselves feel better. Respect is an essential component of self-esteem. Parents want to be respected by their children. You can teach your children to relate to people with respect by respecting their ideas, feelings, and attempts.

Gifted children wither with a mandate to perform perfectly. A major source of their depressions is that they feel that they do not achieve according to their own and other's high expectations. You can cushion your children from debilitating disappointments by showing them appreciation for their doing well **and** for doing poorly! Reward their **trying** an activity and discovering what they learned! How many ways can you convey, "I admire you"?

A page of "Killer Statements" is in *Guiding the Gifted Child* (Webb, Meekstroth & Tolan, 1982). The lethal list starts with "Stop living in an ivory tower" and stoops to "Do it because I said so!" (p. 130). Many readers have commented that they did not recognize how caustic their casual comments can be.

Although asking "Why?" is a hallmark of giftedness, your explaining the **reasons** for your requests enables children to make effective choices. Self effectiveness is acquired when parents honor their child's internal control of behavior. People tend to repeat behaviors that engender rewarding effects. Thus, self-esteem is nurtured when you show your enjoyment of your child's autonomous behaviors. Your relationship becomes an instrument for developing their sense of self competence. How many ways can you show your children that they are capable of thinking for themselves?

We are human *beings*, not human *doings*. Children need to know that they are valuable just because they exist. When your child comes home, invest 3 seconds in "I'm glad to see you!" punctuated with a hug. Another day, offer, "I'm happy you live with me!" How else can you tell your children, "You are important to me; you are loveable"?

As always, take your children seriously; listen as if they have something important for you to know; and smile. . . it's good for **you!**

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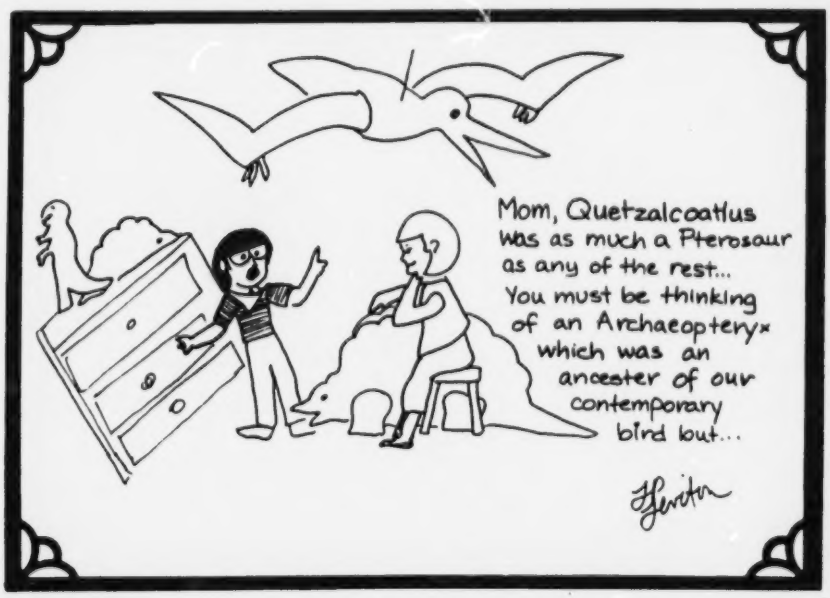
Elizabeth Meckstroth is a therapist and consultant in Chicago, Illinois, and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.

Note: ***Annemarie Roeper's column does not appear in this issue as she recently lost her husband, George Roeper, an early leader in gifted education and the progressive education movement. We will all miss George, who was, above all else, a truly kind human being.***


Mom, Quetzalcoatlus was as much a Pterosaur as any of the rest... You must be thinking of an Archaeopteryx which was an ancester of our contemporary bird but...

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Karen C. Nelson

Using Human Dilemmas To Teach Evaluation

Evaluation is the highest level in Bloom's Taxonomy. One way to teach students to develop skill in evaluative reasoning is through consideration of human dilemmas. In a dilemma there is no clear cut right answer; we must deal with the apparent gray areas of a social or moral problem which creates a genuine conflict for individuals.

Moral Reasoning (Galbraith & Jones, 1976) suggests a process for teachers to use as an instructional strategy. Dilemmas are accompanied by Teaching Plans for putting the stories to use in the classroom. The process can be applied to dilemmas found in history, literature or current events.

The first dilemma in the book is presented as a memo from a superintendent to a 12th grade social studies teacher whose students complete Action Modules to address real problems in their community. A group of students is conducting a rigorous campaign to improve public transportation options for senior citizens. Lack of response to petitions and appeals caused the students to resort to a city-wide bus boycott being widely supported by other students. The superintendent wants the boycott called off and the issue dropped, or the students expelled.

The Teaching Plan has four parts. In the first part, the dilemma is confronted through presentation of an audio or video tape, news article, political cartoon, letter to Ann Landers, etc., describing a situation. Students are asked to define unknown terms. Then they must agree to a clear statement of the problem confronting the main character (e.g., How should the teacher respond to the memo?)

In the second part of the plan, a *tentative position* is arrived at by giving individuals time to reflect, then commit to a position in writing. After individual positions are established, the teacher assesses the class position—is there substantial disagreement? There needs to be initial disagreement for thoughtful discussion to ensue. If there is not at least a 70/30 difference in individual positions, *alternative dilemmas* are posed in which additional information is added to the original situation to give it a different slant. Before proceeding the teacher elicits some of the reasons for individual positions from both sides.

The third part of the plan calls for students to group with four or five peers with the same individual position, to explore reasons for their position, agree on a best reason, and develop a thoughtful question for a group who took the opposite position. This phase concludes with a whole group discussion in which groups present their "best" reasons and address questions to other groups. The teacher provides organization for the discussion by listing reasons presented on a chalkboard.

The final phase of the process begins with summarizing positions taken by opposing groups. Students are asked to prioritize the best reasons provided by each side. Next, a time for individual reflection is called for again as students are asked to write their positions and supporting reasoning on an index card. They are also asked to record any changes noted in their thinking. Before leaving the classroom they are asked to turn over the index card and write out the most acceptable reason they heard for the opposing position.

To follow up the exercise, the teacher may announce an adult guest (school administrator? social studies teacher? attorney?) will be present at the next class session to discuss the position he or she would take in response to the dilemma. Students can be encouraged to continue the dialogue outside of class by presenting the dilemma to others and asking them to define a position. Throughout the activity students are encouraged to avoid early closure, to continue to explore the issues in the dilemma.

The subtitle of *Moral Reasoning* is *A Teaching Handbook for Adapting Kohlberg to the Classroom.* Although the process of exploring a dilemma to develop thinking skills can stand on its own without the use of the Kohlberg paradigm, an interesting follow-up activity is to teach the Kohlberg stages and have students sort the index cards generated in the dilemma activity into the six stages. Students can analyze if opposing positions reflect different levels of moral reasoning.

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Karen C. Nelson, Ph.D., is Coordinator of the graduate program in gifted education at Emporia State University in Kansas. She has been a public school teacher, curriculum editor, writer and poet.

Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

In the Reading Room this time we focus on the strange phenomenon of the prodigy.

William Sleator is primarily a writer of what could be called intellectually challenging young adult science fiction. His prodigy novel, *Fingers*, contains a strong element of fantasy, with an edge of horror.

The story is told in first person by 18-year-old Sam, who is not, at the beginning, the recognized prodigy. He is the half-brother of Humphrey, the 15 year old with huge hands and magic fingers, who has for ten years supported the family by playing the piano. At 15, however, his fame is disintegrating, because his ability is a purely technical ability, untouched by heart or feeling or understanding of the music he plays.

Sam, who loves the mathematics and logic of music, and can both feel and understand it, has small, awkward hands and can't play. Bitterness and jealousy have been his only feelings for Humphrey. In another author's hands, this book might be a simple and direct exploration of the sibling rivalry that almost inevitably exists in a family that contains multiple children and one publicly acclaimed "prodigy." However, Sleator provides a fascinating twist.

Their mother plans to rescue Humphrey's career by telling the world that he is visited by the ghost of a dead composer, who communicates new compositions through him; he will continue his world tour, playing these new compositions that Sam, with his superior understanding of music, will write. As the story progresses what began as fraud begins to seem possible. Are Humphrey and Sam separate individuals, or are they the two sides of a ghost?

Midnight Hour Encores, by Bruce Brooks, deals with the strangeness of prodigy in a very different way. Sixteen-year-old Sibilance T. Spooner is a cello prodigy, solitary, dedicated, world renowned and motherless. A few hours after her birth in California, her hippie mother named her Starness Blue, and gave her to her father to raise. He moved himself and daughter immediately across the continent. Disliking both the name and the mother who gave it to her, Sib took a new name at eight and began creating herself. The novel follows Sib back to California on a quest for a cello teacher worthy of her musical talent and, almost accidentally, for her mother.

In an oddly abrasive manner Brooks does succeed in capturing the strangeness of the prodigy. However, it is hard for the reader to care for or identify with Sib; one wonders if Brooks himself likes or understands his character. Music seems for Sib not a passion but a device for focusing the world's attention on her SELF, and putting everyone else down. Though it is true that a prodigy must be willing to single-mindedly pursue his or her career, Sib is almost unbelievably independent. Could she really have won the world prizes she has won and become an internationally know cello prodigy with only an obscure teacher and a father who seems barely to care about classical music?

Neither book gives us a fully developed, three dimensional, believable prodigy. But they are differing expressions of our difficulty understanding the prodigy phenomenon. Perhaps the latter demonstrates how hard it is even for an accomplished writer to get fully into the mind and heart of a person so far outside the norms of human existence.

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Home Portfolios:
A strategy for documenting your child's early years of development

The rapid development of young gifted children is often noted early in life. It is not unusual for parents to comment on complex language development, precocious artistic ability, or advanced mathematical skills even when their child is still in the second year of life! It is important that this development be documented systematically. Home Portfolios preserve the treasured memories of the period before kindergarten, and also provide parents with authentic artifacts and observations that can later be shared with the child's teachers.

What is the Home Portfolio?

Recording a child's development is not a new phenomenon. Parents have traditionally noted milestones in baby books, written anecdotes in journals, displayed art work on the refrigerator, and snapped photos capturing "red letter" events. The Home Portfolio, however, is a step beyond these tried and true strategies. It encourages parents to document their child's development in a more systematic, comprehensive, and authentic manner and place such documentation in a single repository. These authentic artifacts, illustrating the child's abilities, offer an objective validation of the child's precocity. Such validation clearly surpasses parental verbal descriptions and are useful to the child's future teachers.

What should be saved in the Home Portfolio?

Young gifted children tend to be prolific creators of ideas and products. If parents documented each idea and saved every product, no doubt an entire storage room would have to be devoted to the endeavor! Therefore, guidelines to aid the selection of samples are necessary. It is important to save samples that represent each area of development: cognitive (intellectual), physical, social, and emotional, in an effort to present a portrait of the total child. Within each of these domains, samples should be collected that depict a special interest, illustrate a pattern of development, indicate a milestone, or exemplify the child's personality.

With a very young child, the parents will be the primary selector of the samples (although any willing members of the extended family and babysitters should also be included in the process). As the child begins to understand the nature and the purpose of the portfolio, he or she should be encouraged to save "special work." (The term "special work" is more inclusive and less value laden than "best work," especially for gifted perfectionists.) As pieces are placed in the portfolio, parents should engage the child in reflection by discussing and recording such things as why the child chose the specific sample for the portfolio, what the child likes best about the work, or how the piece makes him or her feel. These dialogues will serve to enhance the child's self-esteem and instill a sense of pride. How wonderful for both the child and the parent!

How do you save the samples?

A variety of methods must be employed to capture the richness of the child's development. Each sample should include the date, the child's age, the person selecting the sample, and a brief rationale for the inclusion of the piece. Suggested methods for saving samples include:

- Actual pieces of work such as crayon drawings, dictated stories, and water colors
- Photographs of three-dimensional work such as Lego and block buildings, costumes, train systems, collages, and clay sculptures
- A single cassette tape recording language and musical development such as storytelling, rhymes, jokes and puns, and improvisational songs and recitations
- A single video tape recording such developmental milestones as the child describing a creation, playing a game he or she invented, participating in a dramatic improvisation, or bouncing a ball
- Notable moments (observations) recorded on 4 by 6 index cards to note highlights of the child's social and affective development
- A list of books the child enjoys listening to as well as xerox copies of pages from a sampling of books that the child can read.

The Home Portfolio provides a wonderful way to document the treasured memories of a child's early development. As the child and the parents engage in this process, the wonders of the child unfold, and the parents become keenly aware of the special nature of their gifted youngster. Finally, as the child goes off to kindergarten, the link between home and school is fostered as teachers and parents share the portfolio and work in concert to understand the unique development of this special child.

Lisa Wright, Ed.D., is Director of the Leta Hollingworth Center and an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

2. Because the chances of finding a gifted program during the primary years is slim, as most gifted programming begins after the third grade.

3. Because the one-to-one, individually tailored educational environment at home can better meet the gifted primary student's needs. While school can provide "generic" education, a parent can provide the interest-specific education that will captivate, accelerate, enrich...and nourish a true love of learning.

The Marland Report (1972) warned us about the unhappy plight of young gifted students in regular classrooms and the dangers of educational regression or educational retardation. Although this report is now 20 years old, the situation in kindergarten and the primary grades has not changed very much.

> ***A parent can provide the interest-specific education that will captivate, accelerate, enrich and nourish a true love of learning.***

Reviewing Whitmore's (1986) conclusions from the Cupertino Project for Underachieving Gifted Students, one might worry about the development of a pattern of poor school achievement for many gifted primary students. Whitmore emphasizes that young children who enter school with advanced skills get no joy from repeating material they already know. They learn to "pace themselves to avoid another sheet of the same activity!" (p. 126). Curriculum content, lack of intellectual peers, lock-step skill sequencing, rigid teaching methods, uninspiring texts, and teachers underinformed about dealing with gifted pupils all conspire to decrease the gifted primary child's motivation and sense of self-worth.

Precocious readers may be particularly vulnerable. "When a six year old who loves to read and is accustomed to reading several books a day encounters the typical basal reading system, the beginning of the end of a love affair with reading may result" (Renzulli & Reis, 1991, p.30). With a reported drop in textbook difficulty of two grade levels over the past 10 to 15 years (Renzulli & Reis, 1991), one cannot help but speculate that we are now losing more of our brightest to boredom.

Gifted primary children, particularly highly gifted children, are at a genuine disadvantage entering the average public school system. Although young, these children have the same need for high level, challenging learning activities that older gifted students require. Instead, they will probably face the same readiness activities as the average kindergartner: "letter of the week" and a seemingly endless supply of sequencing and classifying and coloring activities. Without a flexible, differentiated curriculum, such children are at best bored. Without an astute teacher, such children are at risk. What is the effect on the child?

Whitmore (1986) paints a worrisome picture of the gifted primary student in average classrooms:

...school experience can be hazardous to the mental health and achievement motivation of young gifted children. Rather than facilitating the development of exceptional potential for learning and academic achievement, it can produce damaging effects on the child's perception of self and others, attitudes toward school, and social competence. The result can be the transformation over a period of 1-3 years from a highly motivated and confident learner, eager to go to school, to a child described as unmotivated, lazy, and a social isolate, with signs of very low self-esteem. (pp. 131-132)

Clearly, unless gifted primary children are identified and appropriate programming provided for them, many risk seriously diminished academic potential and—far more debilitating—low self-concepts.

Although educators in the gifted/talented field need to continue the push for earlier identification, the likelihood of quick enlightenment on appropriate primary programming is doubtful in the current economy. Thus, homeschooling enters the picture as a viable alternative to public school.

Many parents who choose homeschooling do so as a reaction after their child has undergone some type of negative experience in public schools. But parents of gifted primary students should attempt to be proactive rather than reactive, and make decisions regarding the fit between their child and the local school situation before the time for admission arrives. It is easier to avoid damage than to repair damage, particularly to self-concepts.

Parents choosing to homeschool a gifted primary student need not feel isolated or odd. Homeschooling magazines are available, structured curriculums can be purchased, and homeschooling networks are in place. (See *Understanding Our Gifted*, Volume 1, Issue 3.) Most cities and large towns have regular homeschooling association meetings and share field trips and various social events, as well as offering emotional support.

However, most homeschooling parents choose this educational alternative for reasons perhaps quite different from

the parents of gifted children, frequently involving issues of religious freedom or fear of negative socialization (Williams, Arnoldsen and Reynolds, 1984). Thus, parents of gifted children must view some networking advice and recommended curriculum with caution. Curricular offerings may well be aimed at the average learner. Homeschooling parents of gifted students must be fully aware that they, too, can squash their own child's intense desire to learn by shifting the worst rather than the best of public school to the kitchen table. Buying a standard commercial curriculum and just stepping up the pace quite likely will not provide the true differentiation gifted learners need. It is crucial to remember that gifted children crave to explore topics and concepts in depth, frequently refusing to move on until their curiosity is satiated.

Homeschooling a gifted primary child offers the opportunity to tailor an entire learning environment to the gifted child's areas of interest. Centering a curriculum upon those interests will provide the depth needed while facilitating the learning of "basics."

While pursuing a special interest, children are acquiring and practicing the basic skills of reading, writing, and recording information. They learn how to use resources, communicate with others, and assume responsibility. Tasting the joy of the pursuit of knowledge, whether following one's favorite baseball team or collecting information about planets is inspiring. (Indiana Curriculum Advisory Council, 1990)

This possibility of designing an entire curriculum to suit strong interests in a student makes homeschooling the ultimate laboratory for individualizing instruction. If a child is intensely interested in snakes, snakes can be the topic for math, science and geography, for history, literature and social studies, at a multitude of levels. Freed from 40 minute lesson segments (which may help destroy continuity of thought and attention), the homeschooler can seek snakes at pet stores and museums, talk leisurely with a herpetologist, or buy a king snake for close range study. At home, there is time for in-depth, long-range learning activities.

It is crucial to remember that gifted children crave to explore topics and concepts in depth, frequently refusing to move on until their curiosity is satiated.

Colfax and Colfax (1988) report that the public school child spends approximately 1,100 hours in school per year, but only 220 hours (20%) "on task." Even if this is somewhat underestimated, the potential efficiency of homeschooling is readily apparent. If a homeschooling parent chooses to follow a formalized program of reading/writing/math/science instruction two or three hours per day, there are still many hours left for the gifted child to keenly pursue his or her own special interests.

The issue of one-to-one instruction also raises a common major objection to the homeschooling movement: lack of socialization. In reality, the homeschooling parent can provide superior socialization to that of the age-isolation in public schools, by taking the gifted child into a multitude of settings and facilitating interaction with a variety of people. The world contains a wide range of individuals to learn to communicate with, not just age-mates. Too much contact with age-mates may even be undesirable, as suggested by McCurdy's research on the childhood patterns of genius:

...the present survey...suggests that the typical developmental pattern includes as important aspects: (1) a high degree of attention focused upon the child by parents and other adults, expressed in intensive educational measures and, usually, abundant love; (2) isolation from other children, especially outside the family; and (3) a rich efflorescence of phantasy, as a reaction to the two preceding conditions...It might be remarked that the mass education of our public school system is, in its way, a vast experiment on the effect of reducing all three of the above factors to minimal values, and could, accordingly, tend to suppress the occurrence of genius. (p. 461)

The best homeschooling parents will certainly not isolate their children socially, but will bring a more realistic social balance into their lives than the public classroom provides, while allowing time to simply think and be alone. Homeschooling parents should strive both to acquaint their child with a wide pool of humanity, and to find one or two intellectual peers for their child to associate with on a regular basis. Such peers can be located through participation in church groups, cub scouts, 4-H gymnastics, similar club activities, local advocacy groups for the gifted, or special weekend and summer programs regularly offered for gifted children.

All this takes effort—consistent, hard, dedicated effort. Homeschooling is a major commitment, even if that commitment is for a three or four year period, until a child's school district offers appropriate gifted programming. The bulk of homeschooling falls on whichever parent chooses to stay at home as teacher—usually the mother. It is an enormous, time-consuming task, particularly if there are other younger children at home who need

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attention and want to "participate" in everything. Homeschooling requires a financial restructuring if a family is accustomed to two incomes. It is not always fun. A certain amount of patience is required, for children can become just as turned off by a sarcastic parent as by a sarcastic public school teacher.

Certainly homeschooling is not the option for every parent or every child. But for some, homeschooling can be one of the most satisfying experiences of education. Homeschooling can provide the gifted primary child with a rich curriculum and nurturing atmosphere that together build foundations for academic excellence and high self-esteem.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING

Kathi Kearney, M.A. Ed.

1. IS HOMESCHOOLING LEGAL? Yes, under varying conditions, in all states. Contact state homeschooling groups or your state Department of Education for specifics.

2. WHAT ABOUT SOCIALIZATION? Homeschooled children are just as likely as conventionally schooled children to participate in extracurricular and group activities. Research shows them to be at least as well-adjusted socially as their conventionally schooled peers (Ray & Wartes, 1991).

3. HOW DO HOMESCHOOLED CHILDREN PERFORM ACADEMICALLY? Homeschooled children as a group score higher on achievement tests than conventionally schooled peers (Ray & Wartes, 1991).

4. WHY IS HOMESCHOOLING A PARTICULARLY PROMISING ALTERNATIVE FOR HIGHLY GIFTED CHILDREN? Highly gifted children are often "immersion learners." Homeschooling provides the extended time these children need to pursue their interests and their questions in depth. Children with extraordinary special talents in areas such as ballet or acting must make difficult choices to focus professionally on the talent area while still in middle childhood. Often they forego a top level academic education, simply because of time constraints. Homeschooling allows them to have both. Finally, homeschooling permits the maximum educational flexibility many highly gifted children need. Changes in an educational program can be made immediately, responding to ongoing, often asynchronous, development with a speed no traditional school can possibly match.

5. WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE? Many colleges, including such prestigious institutions as Harvard University, Thomas Aquinas College, and Boston University, actively seek applications from homeschoolers. Document your program and keep good records; an outside evaluation at the end of each school year by a certified teacher or guidance counselor is extremely helpful. Homeschooled students' SAT or ACT scores may actually carry more weight on a college application than those of traditionally educated students, since those scores are the one thing homeschoolers will have in common with all other applicants. Finally, students should take the GED (high school equivalency) test; it assures at least one official educational credential and opens the door for receipt of federal financial aid.

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public schools, while often able to offer the benefits of community involvement and a high student-teacher ratio, can also suffer from an oppressive narrowness of outlook and a tight limitation of resources; and private education can be prohibitively expensive and may be too distant geographically for a child not ready to spend long periods far from home. Nothing is left for a student trapped like this—nothing, that is, but to create an exit of his or her own: to break out of the confinement before he or she is stifled.

My family and I found ourselves in such a situation in the early 1980's. We had come to the unhappy realization that our local school system could not or would not fulfill my educational needs, and no conventional alternative appeared to offer the learning opportunities we had hoped for. Fortunately, it was at this time that we learned of an old idea newly revived: that of home study—"homeschooling" as it is popularly known.

While I had been simmering through grades five and six, my mother was finishing a teaching degree at Johnson State College in Johnson, Vermont. There she met Kathi Kearney, the founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children, who was at that time completing her Master's degree at Johnson. Kathi was one of the pioneers in the Maine home-schooling movement, and she had helped another family with gifted children to set up a home study program, in which the students and parents provided their own education. She suggested that something similar might work well for my family. The more we thought about the idea, the more we liked it.

Time passed and another summer came; the local junior high school was due to inflict itself upon me in the fall. My younger brother, Ben, was vehemently opposing reincarceration in elementary school. We all decided that the time had come to try the homeschooling option. My parents procured copies of the new Vermont state rules and regulations, and, with Ms. Kearney's advice, we designed a complete individualized curriculum. We even dared to submit it—and dared further to hope that it would be approved, going so far as to neglect the end-of-summer ritual of buying new clothes for school. On the day before the regular school year began, we were notified that our home study proposal had been accepted. I was free at last.

New Feathers, New Wings

When a new hatchling emerges from the confinement of the egg, it discovers a place of unexpected size, filled with amazing multitudes of sights, scents and sounds. The vastness of the multifarious world is intimidating; yet, from the first, the young bird senses that this is home. It fluffs its thin feathers and settles down, knowing that it is right where it belongs.

For my family, the commencement of a home study program was not so much the discovery of a new style of education as the recognition and exploitation of an ongoing way of learning that had always been natural and near at hand, and which we could now employ full time in place of a part-time, artificial system that had never worked. Home study also brought the development of new roles for myself and my parents: those of homeschool student and homeschool teacher. These roles were free from the ghostly influence of preconceived stereotypes; they followed and grew out of our learning explorations instead of attempting to govern them. We followed our inclinations and tried to make best use of the unexpected, everyday events—a new butterfly's emergence, a strangely shaped cloud overhead—that can lead to the discovery of so much. In effect, we were acknowledging the indivisibility of living and learning.

In effect, we were acknowledging the indivisibility of living and learning.

This is not to say that we weren't unsteady at the outset of our venture. On that first day, when all of the other children had hopped onto the bus with their lunches packed and their new jeans on, we sat excitedly around the kitchen table and "looked at each other," as Keats wrote, "with a wild surmise." Anything could happen. Many things did.

For the first few weeks, still cautious, we adhered strictly to our curriculum schedule. Gradually, however, we grew to recognize what is perhaps the greatest advantage of home study over other educational methods: its *flexibility*. We began to experiment more freely, and made many a discovery. We discovered a preferred method of approach for each subject, sometimes focusing on reading and analysis, at other times on discussion, lecture, imitation or hands-on experience. We discovered that we had no need for grades or report cards, nor for strict schedules for any subject except mathematics. We discovered that it was all right to modify our curriculum as the year progressed, to adapt to changing interests and give deserved attention to current events worldwide. We discovered that we did just fine without the guidance of any educator's latest theories—no theory has yet explained me, anyhow.

Finally, we discovered that opportunities for learning are as limitless as the will to seek them out.

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Our 62 acres of forest and field became a field laboratory for botany and zoology. Our large, slowly accumulated library yielded forgotten treasures. My parents' past experiences offered practical knowledge. My brother and I incorporated our role-playing games into the homeschooling process, eventually producing thousands of pages of writing, art and statistics. Searching for community resources, we went to lectures at the Center for Northern Studies in Wolcott, Vermont, and gave a lecture of our own on winter entomology at the Craftsbury, Vermont, elder hostel.

The Search for Nourishment

Life in the forest isn't always easy. There are cold times and lean times when the food is scarce, and the birds must go seeking in unfamiliar places to find what they need to keep them going.

The homeschooling process isn't idyllic. There are sunny days and dull days when a student loses enthusiasm for anything that resembles study, and a teaching mother or father lacks the necessary charge of patient inspiration to set a wayward mind back in motion. There are moments when personalities clash over trying subjects. Problems and questions arise which seem impossible to answer. At other times, the difficulty is the acquisition of material resources. Good textbooks, for example, are often hard to find and outrageously costly. We found ourselves travelling as far away as Maine, where a discount store sold a huge assortment of inexpensive second-hand books, in order to find good algebra and history texts. Many other volumes came to us from yard sales, from nearby college libraries, from friends eager to be rid of old college reading matter.

At still other times the challenge was less concrete, but no less formidable. My family and I were not immune to feelings of loneliness and alienation. Especially during the early years, we were all weighed on by doubts as to the wisdom of our choice and worries about the responsibility that we had taken upon ourselves. My mother gave up her teaching job at the local high school in order to be at home with my brother and me—a sacrifice which won few friends in our small town. I missed the chance to join local sports and other activities. I remember one evening, early in October of the year I turned 14, when I was helping my father finish putting a roof on a home that stood near the town soccer field. The school soccer team was playing, and an unpleasant mood of estrangement hung over me as I watched them in the distance. I would have been on that team had the local principal not objected to a homeschooler's participation.

> ***Gradually, however, we grew to recognize what is perhaps the greatest advantage of home study over other educational methods: its flexibility.***

We held to our course, however, and things worked out for the best. Denied the school sports teams, my brother and I, and our parents as well, joined a Tae Kwon Do club in the nearby town of Morrisville. Ben and I have since received the rank of black belt and continue to practice the Korean martial art. For other athletic opportunities we turned to the solo sports of hiking, canoeing, and cross-country skiing. When we wanted to investigate academic subjects difficult to study at home, we turned to the Community College of Vermont (CCV), where I took courses in psychology, sign language, public speaking, and a number of other areas.

Encounters with Other Denizens

The birds always twitter when a new, strangely colored finch arrives in the forest, or when another young fledgling tries its wings. They wonder at its plumage, observe its habits of feeding, regard its ways of flight. Most of all, they consider its future role among the other creatures of the forest.

Eight years ago, home study was an entirely unfamiliar idea to most people that I encountered. Today, although many have heard something or other about this odd topic, a wide curiosity remains. Most new acquaintances bubble with interest when they learn that I "skipped out on high school," and almost all adult questioners begin their inquiry in the same way. It runs something like this: "You study at home, do you? Then what do you do about socialization?" I have always found this surprising and not a little distressing. In many cases these people have already granted that public education is easily bested and consider social interaction to be the only worthwhile thing that a student can receive at public school. Another possibility, worse yet, is that they feel socialization to be more important than education at an institution created with the specific intent of educating children. (I have been tempted to ask certain of these people if they would favor six hours of recess during each school day so that the socializing that goes on then would suffer less interruption by books and such things.)

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Of course, some of these people are simply recognizing that socialization and education are not necessarily incompatible with and exclusive of each other. What they fail to see is that both of these are simply smaller parts of the process of life in general—parts which it can be unwise to separate from the whole. If it is not necessary for a person to attend an educational institution in order to explore the deeps of the sciences and humanities (and it isn't), it certainly is not necessary for anyone to go to school to learn to interact productively with fellow human beings.

Most public schools provide an unrealistic and frequently a harmful social environment for their students. The familiar specter of peer pressure is difficult to exorcise and dangerous to ignore—assaults on a student's integrity and self-respect occur with alarming regularity. Many of the friendships and relationships that develop among public school students are associations of convenience only, and rapidly fail when graduation renders them unnecessary. Furthermore, the world at large is simply not composed entirely of anyone's age peers. If a child learns to relate only to others of the same age from the same town, he or she is likely to encounter difficulties when adulthood and its challenges approach.

The freedom of a home study program allowed my brother and I the time to meet and interact with people of all kinds—despite some acquaintances' suspicions, we didn't spend all our time closeted with books (or with a TV either—we don't own one). Social learning went on apace with other learning. I learned to be comfortable among adults at CCV and the Center for Northern Studies. My Tae Kwon Do club provided a chance to meet with age peers. I studied woodpeckers with a local biologist and Greek history with a retired professor; I gleaned first-hand American history from my grandparents and others who had lived through World War II. My brother, interested in veterinary medicine, has worked with local veterinarians. I can say with confidence that I did not miss public school socialization (even before I became a homeschooler, my best friend went to another school system), and I was certainly happy not to be forced to spend half of each day with a group selected for age and not compatibility.

The public school students I encountered had it right in voicing their typical response to the idea of homeschooling: "Gee—I bet you learn more!"

Flying South

As autumn nears, the birds of the forest feel a stirring within them; the young ones in particular, eager to range on a territory of their own, flex their wings and think of wandering. When the migration comes and the birds go south for the winter, they travel to climates and ecosystems very different from those they knew during the warmer months. The journey is a long one and can be taxing to the utmost; and when they reach their destination, the vast tropic banquet spread before them must seem strange and intimidating. Yet the ways and inclinations of their lives somehow prepared them for the change, and they survive.

It is a rare teenager indeed who has never felt an urge to wander in new places and see new things. I was no exception. When the academic year of 1989-90 approached—the year that would have been my senior year in public high school—I began to wonder what was next, and to yearn for new challenges and a change of scene. I had discovered many deep interests but none that assured me of an incipient career. The two imps of realism and wanderlust insisted that I begin thinking of the future. However much I loved being at home with my family, I knew that it couldn't go on forever. Inevitably, my mind turned to the idea of college.

A large university is a great place for encountering active and intriguing minds, and for discovering unexpected interests and opportunities. I found myself desiring to search through such a cornucopia of possibilities. I harbored the common wish for a chance to be unambiguously on my own, to live in a city or strange town, to buy my own soap and groceries. I even felt a small longing for the stress and challenge of working for a time within a system whose expectations of me and goals for me did not precisely coincide with my own—the challenge of intermixing "my way" and "their way" to gain the knowledge and experience college can offer without sacrificing my individuality. Borrowing a guide to colleges from a friend of mine, I pored over the alternatives and finally chose four schools to which I would apply: Middlebury, Oberlin, Brown and Harvard.

> ***Finally, we discovered that opportunities for learning are as limitless as the will to seek them out.***

The application process was a bit tricky, having been designed and streamlined with a typical high school senior—whoever that is—in mind. As I was riding near the front of the home study storm, my unusual mode of education was new to most members of the various admis sions departments. I was something of an

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enigma—no grades nor GPA, and my class rank (first and last) clearly meaningless. My letters of recommendation were also rather unorthodox; along with my mother's candid evaluation, I sent letters from my Tae Kwon Do instructor and a summer employer. Fortunately, we had kept extensive documentation of my studies over the years, and this helped to fill in the empty spaces; Kathi Kearney, who had done the job of assessing our program all along, provided a summary of this and another recommendation. Where the usual avenues were accessible, I did as other students do—taking the usual tests and so on. Finally, I had numerous transcripts from CCV courses to offer as evidence that I could succeed in a regular classroom. Although initially uncertain, the various colleges were nonetheless very thorough and did a remarkable job of getting to know their odd applicant (I had five different interviews for Harvard alone).

One of the dreams of my family always had been to take a road trip through the United States, visiting national parks and landmarks along the way. As my last full year at home wound down, my parents decided that it was then or never; we loaded up our old white van, "Moby Dick," with camping gear, and away we went on a meandering journey that led us to the southwest and back via Washington, D.C. We returned to find a pile of mail which included several acceptance letters. I decided to go to Harvard.

—And before I knew it, I was there. Some people have wondered whether the transition from homeschooler to college student was unusually difficult. The answer is "no." I pride myself on a certain degree of adaptability, and, after all, most of the other first-year students hadn't gone away to college before, either. All of us had our struggles and our successes. I became an English concentrator and kept up honors grades, joined the Jujitsu and Kendo clubs, was privileged to give a reading with the great Irish poet Seamus Heaney, and managed to hold down two jobs—one as an art gallery guard and the other assisting in the mollusk labs. Two more years have whirled by and the future is looming large once more.

And Home Again

Although the winds are warm and the forest lush in the tropic lands, there is a feeling in the springtime air that reawakens memories, and a migratory bird soon feels the yearning to go north again—to its home, to the place where its nest is, the place where it learned to fly.

When I return each summer after another year at college, I find myself in the old, familiar and familial atmosphere of home. I still enjoy it and I still learn from it, and I am sure it will remain that way. It may be—it is inevitable—that I missed out on certain things by studying at home; but what I gained exceeded any loss a hundredfold. I would do it again, as sure as I have wings.

Elye Alexander writes poetry and fiction, collects insects, and practises three martial arts; he is currently a junior at Harvard University.

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Linda Silverman

Personality Plus

Social Development or Socialization?

A major concern of parents and educators is the social adjustment of their gifted children. All provisions for gifted students—ability grouping, acceleration, pull-out programs, full day programs, special schools, homeschooling—are held suspect on the grounds that they will "prevent the children's social adjustment." Indeed, the remarkable emphasis on the school as an agent of socialization makes one wonder if anyone really cares about the development of these children's abilities or if all that is important is whether they **fit in!**

As a psychologist who has spent over 30 years studying the social and emotional development of the gifted, I believe we need to clearly differentiate between the concepts of *social development* and *socialization*. An immense amount of research has accumulated over the last 70 years on socialization of the gifted, indicating that gifted children tend to enjoy greater popularity, social adjustment, and social competence, earlier psychological maturity, and fewer indications of psychological problems than their less gifted peers (Silverman, 1993). In their recent comprehensive review of the literature, Nancy Robinson and Kate Noble report:

Perusal of a large group of studies of preadolescent children revealed [that] ...as a group, gifted children were seen as more trustworthy, honest, socially competent, assured and comfortable with self, courteous, cooperative, stable, and humorous, while they were also seen as showing diminished tendencies to boast, to engage in delinquent activity, to aggress or withdraw, to be domineering, and so on. (N. Robinson & Noble, 1991, p.62)

It would appear obvious from these studies that gifted children are highly socialized. It is interesting that the context of most of these studies was some form of special provision for the gifted, such as special classes or acceleration. Clearly, then, gifted children's socialization does not suffer the slightest when special provisions are made for their learning needs. Ann Robinson advises parents and educators to

speak plainly on the issue of cooperative learning as therapy for socially maladjusted, talented students. The assumption that gifted children are more likely than others to have a variety of personal and social problems is not supported in the literature. Thus, the pill of cooperative learning may be prescribed for a perfectly healthy patient. (A. Robinson, 1990, p. 35)

Up to this point we have been addressing primarily the issue of **socialization.** According to the dictionary, socialization is the ability to adapt to the needs of the group. Gifted children are very adaptable, particularly girls. But at what price? If one works very hard at fitting in with others, especially when one feels very different from others, self-alienation can result. And this is exactly what we find in so many "well-adjusted" gifted youth and adults. In their desperation to belong, they have given up or lost touch with vital parts of themselves.

Social development, on the other hand, is not the pressure to adapt, but a deep, comfortable level of self acceptance that leads to true friendships with others.

Lasting friendships are based on mutual interests and values, not on age. Individuals with good social development like themselves, like other people, demonstrate concern for humanity, and develop mutually rewarding friendships with a few kindred spirits. Social development goes hand in hand with self-actualization, whereas socialization is merely the desire to conform—often the opposite of self-actualization. The research indicates that special provisions for the gifted foster good social development (Silverman, 1993); this, rather than fitting in, should be our aim for them.

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Kathi Kearney

HE HIGHLY GIFTED

Homeschooling Highly Gifted Children

Karen was driving down the road on her way to the grocery store when her 12-year-old son, Jonathan, called out from the back seat, "Mom! What I *really* need to learn about this year is fluid mechanics." Karen winced. Fluid mechanics was definitely not part of any seventh grade curriculum. She had a feeling it was about to become part of Jonathan's, though—and realized that before the year was over, she herself would know more about fluid mechanics than she had ever dreamed she wanted to learn.

Karen and her husband are homeschooling Jonathan and his two younger brothers. Jonathan is an extremely mathematically gifted child whose other interests involve inventions, engineering, and boatbuilding. (A 12-foot boat with a unique hull design rests unfinished in the family garage; Karen says this is one time she's going to insist on "task commitment" before the snow arrives!) Homeschooling provides Jonathan with an opportunity to pursue his considerable engineering talent in a way that would be impossible for most students his age even in a gifted education program. Karen sometimes notes wryly, "Now I know how Thomas Edison's mother must have felt." But when this unusual "enrichment" of Jonathan's science curriculum seemed imminent, Karen and her husband were genuinely puzzled. How could they, as a homeschooling family, provide instruction in something so specialized?

One of the charges often leveled against homeschooling is that parents will not have expertise in all the academic subjects. Karen and her husband, like any good educators of gifted children, were well aware that they could not possibly have expertise in every area in which their children demonstrated an interest. However, they were determined to be excellent educational facilitators. In this case, Jonathan helped to solve part of the problem temporarily—he decided that he needed to know more mathematics in order to learn about fluid mechanics, and proceeded to accelerate his progress through pre-calculus mathematics. This bought some time for his parents to access resources at a local university.

Homeschooling in the United States has shown steady growth over the past decade (Lines, 1991). We do not know precisely how much of this growth involves highly gifted children. Meadows, Abel, & Karnes (1992), in their survey of the families of 40 homeschooled children in rural Mississippi, found that 20% of these families listed "to meet the needs of a highly intelligent child" (p. 15) as their highest priority for choosing homeschooling. In an unpublished study of 46 children in the 148 - 200+ IQ range, I found that 22% of the children were currently homeschooling (Kearney, 1991). Surprisingly, almost half the group — 43%—had been homeschooled at some point during grades kindergarten through 12.

Homeschooling for highly gifted children is sometimes an option when nothing else works out—when the school cuts the gifted program, eliminates any ability grouping, refuses to allow acceleration, or is genuinely rigid in its stance. However, just as often, homeschooling allows the ideal educational program for a highly gifted child to unfold, by providing *maximum flexibility* in the spirit of the best traditions and the strongest research bases we have in the field of gifted education. This includes the use of acceleration, intense and focused enrichment, flexible pacing, mentorships, internships, early college, and summer programs.

Homeschooling is right for some highly gifted children and their families at some stages of individual and family development. It is not right for everyone. It takes commitment, time, and in two-parent families, a strong and supportive marriage. There will be discouraging days and boring days and grumpy days in the homeschool, as well as exhilarating ones. The rewards, however, are great: opportunities for a child like Jonathan to explore his talents unfettered by age-grade locksteps, opportunities for parents to spend much more time with their children than is common in contemporary society, and opportunities for professionals to observe the unfolding of extraordinary talent within the family crucible.

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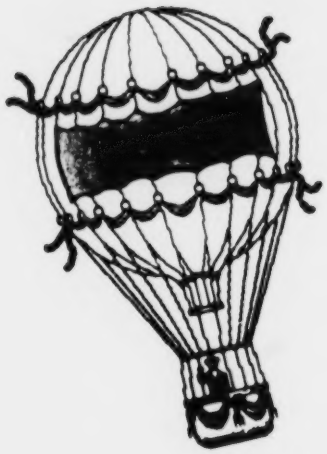
Kathi Kearney is Founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children in South Casco, Maine, a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University, and editor of *Highly Gifted Children*.

IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY



Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Too Young or Too Old? (Part I)

Child to elderly woman: Are you young or old?

Woman to child: My dear, I have been young for a very long time.

On this somewhat reflective journey let us look at age and the role it plays in the creative process. Surely, creativity is as much a predisposition, a mental state, as it is an artifact of the processes of writing, composing, painting, inventing, or performing. The most remarkable stories of creativity are often those stories of people whose sense of wonder is open and childlike even if their chronological years pass the century mark. We marvel at both the feats of prodigies and the productivity of those who seem eternally young and who refuse to consider themselves ever "too old" to continue their creative works. What do these people share? Perhaps the prodigies are too young to know that they should not be able to master adult-like accomplishments and the "elderly" are wiser than most and realize that nothing save death can still the creative procress.

Witness some of the remarkable feats and attainments that defy age-related barriers.

- Mozart memorized music and played the harpsichord at 3.
- John Stuart Mill learned Greek at 3.
- Gustav Mahler composed music at 4.
- Shirley Temple received an honorary Oscar when 6.
- Fred Astaire toured vaudeville as a dancer at 7.
- Annie Oakley was an accomplished markswoman at 9.
- Beethoven played music professionally at age 11.
- Trevor Ferrell created a humanitarian program for the homeless in Philadelphia when 11.
- Anne Frank penned her famed diary when 13.
- Louis Braille invented a new reading system for the blind when 15.
- George Parker invented, manufactured and sold his first board game at 16. With his brother, Charles, he later formed the board game company, Parker Brothers.
- Steve Jobs headed the billion dollar Apple Computer Company when he was 21.

At the other end of the age spectrum, consider these accomplishments:

- Laura Ingalls Wilder began her writing career at 63.
- Harlan Sanders started his Kentucky Fried Chicken business when 66.
- Leo Tolstoy took his first bicycle lesson at 67.
- Jessica Tandy and George Burns won Oscars at the age of 80.
- Benjamin Franklin helped draft the U.S. Constitution when he was 81.
- Claude Monet created magnificent water lily paintings when 84.
- Pablo Picasso saw past works honored at the Louvre on his 90th birthday; he continued to paint until his death at 92. In a lifetime, he produced 20,000 works of art.
- P.G. Wodehouse published a *Jeeves* book at 90.
- Grandma Moses held an exhibition of her paintings in London when 96.

In the tapestry we call life experience, there are, fortunately, threads of individuality—people of prodigious talent and creative spirit who defy categorization or pigeon-holing.

(Continued on page 18)

Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

Marc Littler's interest in home-schooling goes back to long before he had any children. While a graduate student in the 1970's, he came upon a book which piqued his interest about the way children learn. It subsequently influenced his thoughts about the education of his children, now ages 10 and 4.

The Children on the Hill, by BBC broadcast journalist Michael Deakin (1972), tells the story of a family living in a secluded village in Wales, and the approach of the parents, Martin and Maria, to their four children's early years. Deeply concerned about a popular culture which they perceived to be materialistic and aggressive, the parents set out deliberately to bring up their children in a socially harmonious, non-competitive, and nurturing environment. In tandem with this philosophy went a profound belief in children's natural curiosity and interest in the world. Drawing on a background in Montessori education, Maria created a carefully "prepared environment" which fostered that natural curiosity and then made it her central focus to be around at the right time, with the right resources, to take advantage of the "teachable moments" which arose for each child.

The accomplishments of each were truly remarkable, whether their talents lay in mathematics or music, science or painting. Although the children were not formally identified as gifted, it is clear that they were endowed with great natural ability. Deakin emphasizes, however, that intellectual achievement was not the goal for Martin and Maria. Their process was aimed at engendering in their children a sense of respect for themselves and for others, and an essential part of that was that they be given the scope to pursue their interests and talents to their fullest extent.

The Children on the Hill portrays an extreme approach to child rearing and raises some concerns—in particular about the isolation of the children and the intensity of the relationships between mother and children. Despite this darker side, Marc Littler came away with a strong sense of how the environment created by these parents differs from that in which most children are educated: He concluded that children raised in any less nurturing an environment must surely fail to achieve their full potential. The questions posed by the book remained with him when his own children came along years later. In the next issue, we will look at how its ideas influenced his parenting style and, more specifically, at the educational experiences he shared with his older son during a recent year's sabbatical.

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Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

Creative Ventures *(Continued)*

How we perceive time may say a lot about how we choose to use it. I nearly avoided going to graduate school to earn a doctorate because I worried about the time it would take to earn the degree and achieve my goal. I complained to a friend, "I am 38 years old and it will take at least two to three years to earn my degree." My wise friend merely looked at me, and putting the whole matter into perspective, responded, "How old will you be in two or three years if you don't go to graduate school?" The resolution was obvious. Time was not going to stand still for me regardless of whether or not I went to graduate school, so my answer was not to be found in counting years, but in doing what I wanted to do regardless of the years involved.

In my next column I will suggest a number of activities to help students contemplate the role of age in the creative process.

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors.*

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

I scanned the crowded cafe looking for little Carter. Years had passed, and the young man who greeted me was no longer little (I had to stand on tiptoe to hug him!). Carter was home for vacation, nervously awaiting word from several medical schools as to the status of his application.

We were both excited about seeing each other—our first meeting on "adult" status. Carter and I remember too well the time that we spent together, the hours of anguish during which he poured out his tales of self doubt and unhappiness. And he shared his creative daydreams with me. I was pleased that my role of nonjudgmental listener provided him a place to be himself.

The structure of school has been a continuous struggle to him. As Carter's mind wandered in more creative directions, he stopped trying to conform to institutional rules. He didn't turn in assignments, he was late to class, he stared out the window, and he became so absorbed in fantasy that he didn't respond when someone spoke to him. In short, he shut down. Teachers didn't believe that he could make it, and peers avoided him because he was so different. Carter could not figure out what was wrong with him.

He was determined to attend college and, with a great deal of effort, succeeded. However, at lunch he confided to me his doubts that he would ever reach his goal of becoming a psychiatrist. His crumpled self esteem has not recouped at the same pace as his achievement.

We've made progress in the field of gifted education since Carter began his painful journey through the school system. We've researched the development of giftedness and improved our methods of assessment. We've spoken up to ensure that our special youngsters would not be ignored in the fervor of school reform. The Javits Act for Gifted and Talented Children continues to award grants to qualified recipients and to fund the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. A new Federal Report on Gifted Education is on the horizon.

Yet, we do not have a "laundry list" of solutions (as one desperate parent so succinctly requested). In discussing school alternatives for gifted and talented students in this and future issues of *Understanding Our Gifted*, I am guided by an urgent and immediate need to find what **really** works to make school experiences happy for gifted children.

Dorothy Knopper is a private consultant for gifted education in Colorado and the publisher of ***Understanding Our Gifted.***

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National Association for Gifted Children 39th Annual Convention
November 4-8, 1992. Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, CA. Please join the Global Awareness Division at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, November 4th and on Friday, November 6th from 4:30 to 5:20 p.m. This is your opportunity to get involved and to make a difference. WE NEED YOU! For more information about NAGC, contact Peter Rosenstein, Executive Director, (202) 785-4268.

Research Awards Available from Mensa
Deadline: December 31, 1992. The Mensa Education and Research Foundation offers Awards for Excellence of $500 each to authors of research papers relating to intelligence or intellectual giftedness. Eligible research must have been published in a refereed journal or presented at a professional conference no earlier than January 1, 1988, and must not exceed 30 pages in length. For more information contact Joan E. Bauman, Ph.D., 4636 Candleglow Drive, St. Louis, MO 63129.

1993 Spring Conference of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children
April 30 - May 1, 1993. Ohio's conference on the theme, "Vision 2000: A New Generation," will be held at the SeaGate Centre in Toledo. A concurrent youth program is a special feature of the conference, with 4 strands for grades 1-12. For information, contact conference co-chair, Anne Nalls, Ed.D., 140 South Grove Street, Bowling Green, OH 43402, (419) 352-3576.

Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness
The first journal on adult giftedness, *Advanced Development* focuses on inner development rather than achievement. Volume 4 on "The Self" is now available. The featured theorist is Roberto Assagioli and the moral exemplar is Peace Pilgrim. One-third larger than previous issues, this volume is packed with articles that will inspire you. ($20 for individuals; $30 for institutions.) See the order form on page 14 or contact ISAD, 777 Pearl St., Denver, CO 80203, (303) 837-8378.

FOCUS:
PROMISING PRACTICES

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR TALENTED CHILDREN
Ann Robinson, Ph.D.

ACCELERATION ACROSS THE PYRAMID
Ellie Schatz, Ph.D.

Self values are in jeopardy in any climate where freedom and choice are denied, in a situation where the individual rejects his own senses and substitutes for his own perceptions the standards and expectations of others.

Clark Moustakas,
The Authentic Teacher

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Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

November—December, 1992

Volume 5, Issue 2

Promising Practices for Talented Children

Ann Robinson, Ph.D.

One of the most frequent charges leveled against special programs and services for gifted and talented children and adolescents is that no research exists to support them. Although this charge is applicable to many other educational practices and policies in general and special education, it is particularly dangerous for the field of gifted education. The current cycle of hostility towards bright children, their parents, and the educators who seek to serve them, can be exacerbated by what the media reports and what the policy makers believe. Much of popular belief appears to be the accumulated stuff of legend.

It is crucial that advocates for gifted children be aware of which programs and policies are supported by research and which are not. Effective advocacy efforts may depend on knowing when to invoke research to support requests for service and when other justifications will be more accurate and compelling. In this article, a comprehensive examination of the research on gifted education is described, selected practices with support are summarized, and some important practices that need to be investigated are detailed. This article focuses on using research for advocacy and on what we

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PROMISING PRACTICES

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Acceleration Across the Pyramid

Ellie Schatz, Ph.D.

The pyramid model, which appeared in the mid-eighties, reflected a paradigm shift in gifted education. Leaders of school reform now, in the nineties, need to be cognizant of how that paradigm shift might help in their efforts to raise the standard of excellence for all students. Whether we are concerned about all students or just the very brightest students, promising practices for improving education must occur within a purposeful framework if they are to be effective. Acceleration across the pyramid is discussed as a way of strengthening a philosophical model which has promise as a framework for educational growth and change.

Two battleships assigned to the training squadron had been at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather for several days. I was serving on the lead battleship and was on the bridge as night fell. The visibility was poor with patchy fog, so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all activities.

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing of the bridge reported, "Light, bearing on the starboard bow."

Is it steady or moving astern?" the captain called out.

(Continued on page 11)

FROM THE EDITOR

Warm Greetings from Snowy Colorado!

I am delighted to share with you the refreshing material in this issue. Each of our contributors has critically appraised current practices and offers new insights to guide future practices in the field. Dr. Ann Robinson summarizes the practices in gifted education supported by empirical research. Unfortunately, parent advocacy has not been the subject of investigation (probably because parents don't think of themselves as researchers). Ann strongly urges parents to document advocacy efforts and their results. The next issue of *Understanding Our Gifted* focuses on effective advocacy strategies, and we would welcome additional articles documenting successful efforts in different communities.

Also in this issue, Dr. Ellie Schatz focuses attention on a neglected aspect of Wisconsin's pyramid model—acceleration, and Dr. Ellen Fiedler helps parents determine the best choice of schools for their children. Several of our regular contributors take strong stances on significant issues: Stephanie Tolan asks us to fight against censorship; Annemarie Roeper questions the "no tattling" rule; Deirdre Lovecky suggests we rethink the competitive basis of our gifted programs and male socialization practices; Dorothy Knopper expresses shock at the current movement against individualized programming in education; and Jim Delisle reminds us that many of the answers we seek today can be found in the writings of early leaders in our field.

One promising practice that deserves mention is the development of national standards in different disciplines. These standards are being constructed as a response to the low standing of America's brightest students in comparison with students in other countries. National standards may provide gifted students with a truly challenging curriculum in the public schools. However, Annemarie cautions us that these standards should not be used to pressure children to perform. True reform will happen when education recognizes the unique Self of each child and allows that Self to develop in its own way.

Linda Silverman

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Deirdre V. Lovecky

IDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

The Competitive Gifted Child

At age five, Emily believed implicitly in the existence of Santa. A perceptive child, she was still unaware that people sometimes fooled children; to her all adults told the truth. Yet, she couldn't help noticing that Santa's behavior was a little odd. Not every child appeared to get the same number of toys and gifts. In fact, the children that Emily knew were the poorest received the least. When Emily went to visit her best friend she saw five items under the tree for Joan. When asked what she had gotten, Emily quietly listed only five of the many items. As an adult Emily remembered how she had felt desirous of protecting her friend's feelings.

Contrast this with Mark whose one goal is to amass all the latest fad items in toys and clothes. His response after Christmas is to brag that he got the best Super Nintendo and all the games he asked for plus skis and a skateboard, and many other items, all of which he lists. The boys in the class who got little keep silent knowing they will be ridiculed in this competition no matter how much the items received meant to them.

Mark's competitive nature makes it likely that he will be selected for the school's gifted program. He has spirit, drive and imagination. He gets things done and makes sure everyone knows where to attribute the credit. Mark is always right. Classroom discussions tend to be dominated by Mark's ideas even when he is asked to let others have a turn. Teachers find his behavior somewhat obnoxious, yet rely on his quick answers in all the competitions set for students. Mark is a winner for himself and for the school.

Mark fits very well into the model of gifted education espoused by the school. This Nintendo style of gifted education emphasizes competition, always doing one's best, producing certain products to a high level, and exhibiting high test scores on standardized tests. The teacher sets the activities, and even in the projects in which cooperation is emphasized, students like Mark tend to dominate because the grade is dependent on group performance. Thus, Mark makes sure everyone does it right, that is, according to what his version of right is.

Mark's high degree of competitiveness is fed by the school gifted program. He tends to be lower in empathy and to see other people in terms of objects to be defeated in his efforts to be first and best. In fact, he has to win or he becomes an object, too, for someone else. All of Mark's self-esteem is bound up in being seen as a winner, and he has only contempt for the losers of the world.

Emily tends to give in to Mark. She senses how important winning is to him and how disintegrated his self-image becomes when he loses. Thus, she is often supportive of Mark's ideas and efforts in the classroom. Mark and Emily are a dyad. They work together well because Emily usually sees his accomplishments as much more important than her own. Because she has so much empathy, she cooperates beautifully. Teachers see her as a good student, not too creative herself, but good at elaborating on others' ideas. Unfortunately, in the competitive gifted program, Emily never finds the chance to discover her own strengths or to see that her ideas are meaningful. The rest of the class takes it for granted that she has no ideas and will not be a very high scorer in the competitive games played in class. No one knows about Emily's dreams, and in time Emily comes to devalue them herself.

The chances are high that Emily will grow up to marry a man just like Mark, and he a woman just like Emily. They fit together so well after all. Yet, sometime in later life, both may awaken to the idea that they have missed something along the way. But then, maybe not. After all, in the world of their childhood, they did achieve exactly what was expected, and maybe it will be enough.

Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island, and a frequent author of articles on giftedness in children and adults.

Annemarie Roeper

PARENTING

Tattling Not Allowed

When Lisa was in third grade, one afternoon she was strangely quiet after school. She sat down at the kitchen table without saying a word, drank some milk, ate some cookies, and stared into space. Her mother could not read her expression, but she knew something was wrong. She had learned that Lisa did not like to be asked the typical question, "How was school today?" Usually, however, it was unnecessary to ask, because Lisa was a child who loved to share her experiences and bubbled over with stories and information.

Other gifted children are not always so communicative and like to keep things to themselves. But for Lisa this was unusual, and her mother became really concerned when the afternoon wore on and Lisa remained silent. Finally, she broke the silence: "Lisa, is something wrong or are you sick? I never even knew you could be this quiet for so long. In Europe, people would say, 'Did something crawl across your liver?'"

Lisa burst out laughing. "I never heard you say that," she giggled.

Her mother replied, "My mother always used to say that to me."

All of a sudden Lisa's expression changed. "When you were a child in Yugoslavia, did the teacher and the children say 'No Tattling' when something happened and you tried to tell the teacher?"

Now her mother understood everything. Lisa could not talk to her because she was afraid it was wrong and it was "tattletaling." Lisa's mother put her arm around Lisa. "Honey, no one can tell you not to talk to me. They used to say the same thing when I went to school but I thought people knew better today."

Lisa's face lit up. "You mean, it's really alright to tell you what happened?"

"Of course, you can tell me. Tell me the whole story."

"You know Bobby. He's different—he's so crazy about studying animals. He has so many pets: birds, guinea pigs, white mice...he knows all about them. I love talking to him because there is always something new that he is learning about them. Well, after school these boys took his guinea pig and hid it. They teased him, and told him he would never see it again. Bobby was so upset that he cried. I couldn't stand seeing him so upset. I looked for the teacher, but the boys stopped me at the door. They said, 'Tattling isn't allowed in this school. Bobby must take care of himself. If he wasn't such a nerd, with all his animals and all, we wouldn't tease him so much.' So I came home. But then I thought maybe I shouldn't tell you either."

"I'm glad you did, Lisa. Someone needs to help Bobby. He's a very bright boy and he has different interests. Some children don't understand and tease the one who is different."

The next day Lisa and her mother talked to the teacher. The teacher seemed a little uncomfortable with the discussion. "I'll look into this. It does

go too far," she admitted. "But Bobby needs to learn to stand up for himself and he does act strangely at times. You should not have to take care of him, Lisa."

Lisa did not feel understood. "It just isn't fair," she said to her mother.

And I believe she is right. Children need access to adults in difficult situations when they cannot cope alone. Only then can they feel safe. A situation like this one should be carefully evaluated. Why does Bobby's behavior tempt the others to tease him? Why do these boys have the need to gang up on and tease another child? Could the "no tattling" rule be used to cover up all forms of injustice? A group discussion should be held where all could express their feelings and Lisa should be praised for her empathy.

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, CA, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life***. Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Karen C. Nelson

The Whys and Hows of Teaching Esperanto to Gifted Students

Esperanto is a universal "second language" created over 100 years ago by a young Russian-Polish eye doctor, Ludovic Zamenhof, who lived in a Polish town where Russian, Polish, German and Jewish citizens had no common language. Endorsed by Leo Tolstoy, but labeled subversive by Stalin and Hitler, Esperanto is more popular in Europe and Asia than in the U.S., and recently has shown most growth as a second language among China's youth (Quick, 1989).

Esperanto draws from many sources, including English, French, German and Latin. Based on 16 simple rules, the language is more easily learned than natural languages because of its logical, streamlined systems of grammar and word formation. Pronunciation is also easy to learn because every letter is sounded and has only one sound.

Meaning "one who hopes," Esperanto was the result of Zamenhof's dream as a boy that a universal language could bring down barriers between people, helping all to become brothers and sisters. As Edward Symoens says,

The roots of conflict are in the human heart and mind, and in the society made by human beings. However, it remains true that a common, neutral language would make it possible for all parties concerned to discuss these difficulties and conflicts, and try to find solutions jointly. Discussions at present, conducted via interpreters, are not really discussions but merely parallel communications. Too many nuances are lost, too many misunderstandings persist (Esperanto the Idea Behind the Language, 1990, p. 3).

Why Teach Esperanto to Gifted Students?

One obvious reason is the ease of teaching and learning. Since no one is a native speaker of Esperanto, any teacher can learn to teach the language without extensive preparation. Similarly, gifted students can teach Esperanto to peers in the regular classroom using the *I Teach/You Teach Method* developed by Charlotte Kohrs (1987) who has taught Esperanto to gifted children in the San Diego schools.

A second reason is that learning Esperanto helps students understand their own language better and is a building-block, something like Latin, for learning foreign languages later.

Another reason to teach Esperanto is to facilitate global awareness. The speaker of Esperanto has access to "a cross-cultural literature that is one of the most diverse in the world" (*Esperanto the Idea behind the Language,* 1990, p. 5). Since Esperanto is politically and culturally neutral, international and intercultural communication is facilitated because the language provides a "level playing field" in which no nationality has an advantage. Charlotte Kohrs, President of Children Around the World, has founded Mondo-Rondo (World Circle) which helps classes correspond with other children's groups around the world.

How to Get Started Teaching Esperanto

More good news about Esperanto: teaching materials are quickly available and free or inexpensive. *Let's Talk Around the World*, an eight-lesson packet for introducing Esperanto to Children; a video, *Children Teach Other Children Esperanto;* and *La Bela Planedo* (The Beautiful Planet) which teaches world geography and Esperanto simultaneously, are available from:

Charlotte Kohrs
Children Around the World
3876 Belmont Avenue
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Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

Every fall American libraries and bookstores create displays of books that have been banned or challenged by those who want the right to decide what should or should not be available to readers. Once a year is not often enough to consider this serious problem that is growing at an unprecedented rate, especially in the world of children's books.

In front of every banned books display astonished voices can be heard. *"The Wizard of Oz?* What could anyone object to in *The Wizard of Oz?"* Or, "Anne Frank's diary was one of the most moving books I ever read—what could possibly get it banned?"

The answer to the question, *"What can get a book banned?'* is depressingly simple. Anything. All a book must do to find itself on the ever-lengthening list is to offend someone in some way, particularly if the offended person believes that his or her view of truth is the only correct one. Books have been censored, banned, challenged by many groups from every political position, left to right.

The traditional red flags, of course, are "bad words" (a very broadly applied label) and explicit sexual situations; there are still plenty of people on the lookout for those.

But what about *The Wizard of Oz?* Anne Frank's *Diary?* There are neither "bad" words nor sexual situations in either of these books, nor in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Webb*, or Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*. All have been attacked not because of sex and not (as has been the case in recent years) because of political incorrectness, but because of the fastest growing censorship issue today—religion.

Anne Frank, hiding from the Nazis with her family in a Dutch attic, wrote that she did not believe the particular religion one espoused was as important as belief in God, an individual's real and deep spirituality. To some this attitude is shocking and dangerous. How can they guarantee their children will stay within their own religious fold if someone suggests in print, even another child exploring her beliefs in an inhuman and soul-threatening time of religious/racial persecution (a child who later died because of that persecution), that no single religion is the "right" one?

As for the other books listed above, from Baum to Paterson, the issue is magic. To certain fundamentalist Christians, wizards, witches, talking animals, sorcerers, fairies, elves, goblins—all the rich and engaging panoply of childhood fantasy—represent the new enemy: Satanism. Never mind that some of the writers attacked were not only Christian, but Christian theologians; never mind that the whole history of human story telling, including the Bible itself, contains elements of magic.

Never mind that fantasy has always provided writers the means of dealing powerfully with issues of right and wrong, good and evil. The issue seems simple to the censors. "Miracles" are the province of God, "magic" the province of the devil. From Cinderella's fairy godmother to White's talking spider, all magic must be stamped out.

Censors, no matter what their idealogy, do not trust the human mind. They would stop its explorations, imprison it behind the bars of dogma. Let us take it as our fundamental responsibility to engage our gifted children in discussions of censorship. Don't pretend it isn't happening. Censorship thrives on secrecy. Wonderful, serious and important books deemed dangerous by closed-minded minorities are disappearing from library shelves across this country. The way to cope with censorship is to bring it into the open. Encourage your children to think—and talk about it.

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

KALEIDOSCOPE

You *Should* Go Home Again

"Promising Practices"—the theme of this issue of *Understanding Our Gifted*—is intriguing for several reasons. First, it implies that our knowledge of gifted and talented children is transitory, ever-changing as we learn how better to locate and serve highly able students. Second, "Promising Practices" also hints at the possibility that what we knew in the past, what we *did* in the past, was somehow wrong or incomplete. Lastly, "Promising Practices," as a theme, suggests forward motion and momentum—new trends that develop due to ground-breaking research by eminent scholars at esteemed universities.

So why does the idea of promising practices leave me cold, and oddly disenchanted with the field of education to which I have devoted my career these past 15 years? I'm not against progress—faster jets, medical breakthroughs and microwave ovens are wonderful byproducts of this modern age. So what is it about the search for "new and improved" solutions to our educational dilemmas that makes me want to shout "STOP!" to my colleagues?

I think I know, really, but the reason sounds so. . . well, so *conservative*. (Seldom an adjective used to describe me!) So at the risk of sounding like a charter member of the *Flat Earth Society*, let me reveal my secret apprehension: I am afraid that the search for promising practices will leave in the dust some *past* innovations that have been so useful. For it seems to me that our field can embrace only so many paradigms and strategies simultaneously, and if new ones are to be included then several old ones will have to go.

Thus, in an effort to simplify this weeding our process, let me leave it up to you, my readers, to decide which of these past innovations have worn out their welcomes. And remember, the more *old* ideas you toss out, the more room you make for new and exciting promising practices!

- ✔ *Lewis Terman's idea that intelligence can be measured by an individual test, and that educational adaptations can be suggested on the basis of the test results*
- ✔ *Leta Hollingworth's demonstration that the gifted can learn the basic curriculum in half the day and should spend the other half on group projects and biographical study*
- ✔ *Annemarie Roeper's notion that education is only complete when one considers the emotional and social needs of gifted children, not just their intellectual development*
- ✔ *Ruth Strang's opinion that a parent's eyes and ears are at least as reliable and valid as objective test scores in determining a young child's special talents*
- ✔ *Virgil Ward's assertion that gifted students must be presented rigorous and challenging academic options, not merely "fun and games" enrichment*
- ✔ *Abraham Tannenbaum's belief that prescriptions to solve problems of "underachievement" will not work as long as the term itself is so loosely defined*

I do hope you have selected carefully, for there are many promising practices waiting in the wings!

The point, of course, is obvious: in our perpetual search for the educational equivalent of the Holy Grail, we *may* end up overlooking the fact that the answers to our questions lie over our shoulder, not beyond the horizon.

Let us move forward, by all means, but let us also look back at the lives and works of our field's founders to find answers that benefit the gifted and talented children about whom we care so deeply.

Jim Delisle, Ph.D., author of five books, is currently working on *Fourth Grade, Seventh Heaven*, a chronicle of his return to public school teaching during 1991-1992.

But Doctor, isn't it strange that her first word was "radical?"
Well, if she says anything about Communism or Socialism next, you might think about selling her!

need to know about the advocacy efforts we undertake on behalf of gifted and talented children and youth.

What Is a Recommended Practice?

Is research about special programs and services for the gifted really as bad as opponents contend? What is the state of the knowledge base about giftedness? What do we know about the ways the school, home and community foster or inhibit talent development? Is there research support for what we recommend? Are there gaps in what we know?

To answer these questions, a group of four professionals undertook an eight-year investigation of what the experts in the field recommend in the education and rearing of gifted children. Bruce Shore of McGill University conceptualized the comprehensive project and asked Virgil Ward, Dewey Cornell and me to join him in the effort.* Under the auspices of The Association for the Gifted, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children, we worked, sometimes sporadically, sometimes intensely, to determine the practices that exist in the field and to what extent each practice is supported by research.

The *recommended practice* is central to our work. We define these recommended practices as the considered advice of experts and persons actively involved in the field. They are usually found in books rather than in scholarly journals because books are the record of received knowledge in a field. They are specific pieces of advice in the form of "do," "don't," or "should" statements. Finally, a recommended practice does not imply that the four of us, or the authors of the books from which we gleaned them, are endorsing the suggestions or prescriptions for action. In other words, the knowledge base is not only the assemblage of the *best* information on a topic, but also the information that is *widespread* and likely to be accessed by a concerned teacher or parent. Examples of recommended practices are:

- *Acceleration should be used.*
- *Career counseling is needed, especially for girls.*
- *Education of the gifted with disabilities must recognize both the strengths and the limitations of the individual.*
- *Early admission is appropriate in specific cases.*
- *Acceleration and enrichment should be integrated.*
- *Be sensitive to potential sibling adjustment problems.*
- *Gifted underachievers need early intervention and special identification.*

Overall, 101 practices were identified by a lengthy examination of 100 textbooks in gifted education. The practices are grouped into eight topical categories: (a) Advocacy and Administration; (b) Identification and Assessment; (c) Curricular and Program Policies; (d) Advice to Educators; (e) Advice to Parents; (f) Advice to Professionals; (g) Social and Emotional Adjustment; and (h) Special Groups.

Which Practices Have Research Support?

The practices that receive the strongest support are in the area of identification and assessment, career education and guidance, and in the needs of special groups of gifted students. It is not surprising that identification and assessment issues have been extensively researched; educators have a long-standing interest in intelligence and ways to measure it. The support for career guidance and for the needs of special groups of gifted children is not as widely known in the field.

Supported: Tests with High Maximum Scores

In the practices associated with assessment, using tests with high maximum scores is strongly supported. If tests with low ceilings are used to identify giftedness in children or to monitor their progress, the performance of talented students is artificially depressed by a test that is too easy. In the case of monitoring student progress, performance that is artificially depressed but still appears to meet a minimum criterion, or achieve a respectable percentile rank, renders the needs of our most talented students invisible to the public. Schools and communities assume these students (who could do so much more) are doing "OK." Using tests with insufficient ceilings could obscure the relative differences in a particular child's pattern of capabilities and result in designing an educational program on the basis of misleading information. While an individual child may have considerably greater mathematical capability than verbal, a test with a low ceiling would not differentiate between the two areas. Thus, a student with extremely high aptitude for mathematics might be placed appropriately in an enrichment program with a language arts flavor and be left to languish in a grade level mathematics program.

Supported: The Need for Career Guidance and Education

The specialized career guidance and counseling needs of gifted students are also strongly supported. Serious career interests appear early in multi-

talented children who are often headed for jobs that require many years of formal schooling. Gifted youth rate specialized career education positively in comparison with other school experiences. Delisle (1982) surveyed students and found that without career education, gifted students report that vocational choices are difficult to make. Research indicates that sensitive career counseling, especially for gifted girls, is crucial to their continued interest and high performance. And although there is some concern that youth should not be encouraged to make career choices early, there is broad support for learning about one's interests and capabilities in the context of career awareness.

Using tests with high maximum scores is strongly supported.

The literature also confirms the idea that gifted adults may face difficulties and unhappiness in the workplace. Willings (1983) is a keen observer of the challenges and uncertainties in career development faced by talented people, especially those who are highly creative. His case studies are compelling evidence of the need for differentiated guidance services.

Supported: Creative Strengths of Gifted Persons with Disabilities

A relatively new area of research activity focuses attention on the intellectual and creative strengths of persons with disabilities. Research indicates they need not be abandoned to their limitations, but that talent development is a useful metaphor for these gifted individuals as well as for their mainstream gifted peers.

Gifted children with speech, hearing or vision losses, or with orthopedic impairments, are twice exceptional. Research indicates that interventions are effective despite the challenges their families and educators face. M. B. Karnes (1979) demonstrated that programs for preschoolers help not only the children, but also change the perceptions of their parents as well. Parents more readily accept their children's limitations when they also understand their children's strengths.

Successful interventions for gifted children with disabilities are individualized rather than an application of group programming models. Twice exceptional children are low in numbers; therefore, educators need to serve them on a case by case basis. While the research base on this recommended practice is not extensive, it is consistent. Gifted children with disabling conditions can be found and served well with services that focus on their talents.

Supported: Attend to Low-Income Gifted Students

The investigation of talent in gifted children in low-income families has a considerable history in gifted education. "There are poor children who succeed against all odds" (Robinson, 1991). Passow (1986) chronicled the early efforts in the field to find and serve academically talented students who are also at risk for school failure. Perhaps the most relevant developmental studies of children who succeeded despite economically impoverished environments were undertaken by Werner (1989). She investigated the home, school, and personalities of "resilient" children—those who survived and thrived in adverse circumstances. By following these individuals over several decades, Werner found that some children from low-income homes develop into healthy, happy and high-achieving adults. The key to the positive outcome was the sustained interest of ***one*** adult in the child's life —often a grandparent or a teacher.

Passow (1986) noted that while the standards for school performance should be the same for low-income and their more advantaged gifted peers, the means by which low-income students are served might differ. The research indicates that aggressive recruitment policies, extended try-outs, and support to the children and families through personal and career counseling, increase the likelihood that low-income gifted students will be identified, served and retained in special programs.

While there is a good deal more research desirable to flesh out the picture of needs and corresponding services for low-income gifted students, the existing research base offers support for special attention to this group of children.

What Important Practices Need Help?

In addition to the good news about practices with research support, there are some substantial gaps in the current knowledge base. Some very crucial and widespread practices have not been the subject of investigation. It is important to recognize that while we do not have a body of research to support these practices, we also do not have evidence that they are misguided. We simply have little empirical evidence at all. Unfortunately, some of these practices are extremely important to the continued services to gifted children and their families. The urgency to learn something about these practices is heightened by the present wave of intolerance for programs and services for the gifted learner.

Needed: Research on Advocacy

Several of the recommended practices with insufficient research support are in the area of advocacy. For example, one of these recommended practices

PROMISING PRACTICES Continued from page 9

is, "Advocacy is needed to encourage and maintain support." To date, there have been no systematic studies of the way advocates secure and maintain programs for gifted children. While most professionals involved with the establishment and maintenance of special programs and services feel that advocacy is vital to their success, almost no research exists to support these beliefs. The one study which does explore the history of legislating and funding services for the gifted was done in the former Soviet Union (Dunstan, 1983). It is not likely to influence policy in the United States! Regrettably, the current climate may afford us an opportunity to investigate the importance of advocacy as programs and services without strong community support are cut or eliminated. *It is important that parent groups now finding themselves beset by funding cuts and philosophical battles maintain records and documents which track the success or failure of their advocacy efforts.* Comparative studies that examine the events and actions leading up to successful advocacy should be contrasted with examples of unsuccessful advocacy and discontinued services to gifted children and youth.

A second advocacy issue with insufficient research concerns the show of support a district makes when a full-time person is responsible for the programs and services for gifted students. The recommended practice states: "A full-time coordinator is necessary." This interesting practice is one without data. Several experts have urged that a full-time coordinator is necessary for comprehensive services or for especially good ones. No one has studied the issue. Again, it may be that we are about to have the opportunity to do so. Administrative positions in gifted education are being cut with abandon. We hope the research community will turn its attention to districts which undergo changes in program administration. When a full-time coordinator is given additional administrative or teaching responsibilities, will there be a corresponding drop in services ? Can the drop be attributed to the loss of the full-time coordinator? Are there other factors which also contribute to a diminution of programs and services? Are those factors related to the presence or absence of a full-time coordinator? We don't know, and we need to know.

Needed: Parent Participation in Lobbying

One of the recommended practices centering on advocacy is specific to parents. They are exhorted to "participate in and lobby for programs." Perhaps the most effective model of parental advocacy is represented in the case of parents of children with disabilities; their commitment resulted in federal legislation.

> ***Research indicates that sensitive career counseling, especially for gifted girls, is crucial to their continued interest and high performance.***

Presumably the parents of gifted children are to lobby for good quality programs and especially now to lobby for maintenance of services in the face of budget cuts. Although this practice seems to have considerable face validity, no systematic research exists to document the involvement of parents in initiating legislation and funding, encouraging district establishment and maintenance of services, or improving the school climate for gifted children and adolescents. It is very likely that parents have done all of these things, but almost *no* empirical research has documented their successes or failures. One exception is a recently released study of state level policy initiatives which resulted in exemplary legislation on behalf of gifted students (Gallagher & Coleman, 1992). In their case study of three states with successful track records, some discussion focuses on the importance of parents and community members in initiating services for their children.

Parent groups need to maintain a written record of the ways in which they involved themselves in advocacy efforts and if these ways shifted over time. Does a parent advocacy group that wishes to initiate services use different strategies than an advocacy group working to preserve existing services? Are the most effective groups made up of parents only or is the involvement of skilled teachers and administrators a plus for parent groups? What kinds of advocacy battles are most likely to be won by parent groups? We don't know, and we need to know now.

Summary

The capsule reviews presented here hint at the kinds of advice given about the upbringing and education of gifted children and the degree to which the advice is supported. Recommended practices are a straightforward way to organize our thinking about what research says. Teachers and parents are busy people. There is value in being able to examine quickly the research base for any number of practical suggestions we encounter daily in the search for good parenting and improved school and community services for gifted and talented children and youth.

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*Note: A full review of these practices and the other 95 is found in *Recommended Practices in Gifted Education: A Critical Analysis* by Bruce M. Shore, Dewey G. Cornell, Ann Robinson and Virgil S. Ward, available from Teachers College Press, NY.

ACCELERATION ACROSS THE PYRAMID Continued from page 1

Lookout replied, "Steady, captain," which meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that ship.

The captain then called to the signalman, "Signal that ship: We are on a collision course, advise you to change course 20 degrees."

Back came the signal, "Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees."

The captain said, "Send, I'm a captain, change course 20 degrees."

"I'm a seaman second class," came the reply. "You had better change course 20 degrees."

By that time, the captain was furious. He spat out, "Send, I'm a battleship. Change course 20 degrees."

Back came the flashing light, "I'm a lighthouse."

We changed course.

(Frank Koch, in Covey, 1989, p. 33)

In 1985, a study completed by the Richardson Foundation of Texas suggested that we change course in gifted education. The pyramid project was introduced as a model for considering the directions that might be a part of that change (Cox, Daniel & Boston, 1985). In 1988, Wisconsin adopted its own pyramid plan for gifted programming, based not only on the original pyramid project but also on other current understandings in the field, including the "Individualized Programming Planning Model" for blending gifted education with the total school program (Treffinger, 1986). The model (see figure 1) was based on the following premises:

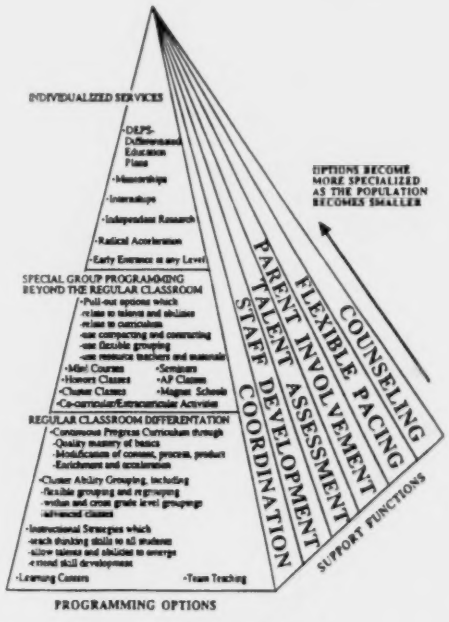
1. All students must develop to their fullest potential.

2. There must be healthy regular programs in the schools to provide a foundation upon which excellence can be built.

3. Excellence is attained only when the ideal of meeting differentiated individual needs is met.

Figure 1

WISCONSIN'S COMPREHENSIVE INTEGRATED GIFTED PROGRAMMING MODEL



The pyramid itself is intended only as a visual aid. It represents a theoretical framework for guiding promising practices. It provides for purposeful planning and program monitoring through the support functions: coordination, staff development, talent assessment, parent involvement, flexible pacing, and counseling. It provides access to appropriately rigorous curriculum for any potentially gifted students through the development of systematic and continuous programming options at three instructional levels: regular classroom differentiation; special group programming beyond the regular classroom; and individualized services (Clasen & Clasen, 1987). And, it suggests new directions for defining giftedness and implementing identification procedures. The concept of "talent assessment" ties programming to past performances and ongoing evaluation through a diagnostic-prescriptive process. Each student's assessed abilities, demonstrated achievements, interests and motivations are examined to determine appropriate pace and level of instruction.

Four years after the model was conceived, we are asking two questions: (1) "Have the promising

practices suggested by the key words of the model—'comprehensive, integrated gifted programming'—actually been implemented?" (2) "Does the model really work?" The answers to both questions are "yes" and "no." Yes, because some districts are successfully using the framework to synthesize the strengths of traditional American education with changes that reflect growth and change in society as a whole, changes which have been validated by solid research data. No, because of what I would characterize as tunnel vision by some educational leaders and agents of change. While jumping on the bandwagon of some reform practices, they fail to examine the compatibility of the changes they are making with other viable practices. They haven't grasped the fact that paradigm shifts have occurred in gifted education, and that the pyramid reflects those changes. Unfortunately, not all of what is happening in the name of school reform reflects the excellence of the pyramid.

Covey (1989) suggests that paradigms should be viewed as maps, that is, explanations for understanding specific aspects of a territory. "Wisconsin's Comprehensive Integrated Gifted Programming Model" represents a paradigm shift, a new map. Because the territory covered by the pyramid is the whole of American education, the map or model is, by necessity, comprehensive. Therefore, careful attention must be paid to the many roads and all of their entrances and exits, twists and turns, hills and valleys—that is, to the intricacies of educational processes, practices and strategies. Attention must especially be focused on the destination: individual student needs.

A Road Too Often Missed

Feldhusen wrote, "My pessimism regarding the pyramid is based on...the fact that there has not been enough emphasis on the dictum that 'students should move ahead as they master content and skills... (Cox et al., 1985, p.158)'. There has been too much emphasis on the base and some enrichment for all." (J. Feldhusen, personal communication, February 23, 1990). He went on to speak about the need for more emphasis on acceleration and special classes for the highly gifted. At the time, it seemed to me that although I understood his comments, such problems did not reflect the pyramid as I defined it. A key point which the pyramid visually demonstrated was that regular classroom differentiation could not meet all students' needs, especially given limited resources and highly diverse classroom populations. The top of the pyramid, as well as the talent assessment and flexible pacing components, dictated an individualized approach that could not ignore the needs of the most talented learners. All we had to do was communicate this.

> ***It seems a paradox that we are viewed internationally as a fast-paced nation of people living fast-paced lives, yet we have over the decades slowed the pace of our instruction.***

Now it seems that Feldhusen was right and the paradigm shift which we envisioned in 1988 has not been made. Too many districts in Wisconsin are suffering from what I call the, "We're-not-doing-that-part syndrome." This means that they are separating the parts from the whole. They are adopting some of the components of the pyramid and ignoring others. And yes, I am afraid that the emphasis is on enrichment for all, to the neglect of acceleration *and* increased rigor *and* increased differentiation. I do *not* believe that in most districts the pyramid has helped us to find the many who need a still greater challenge, a still faster pace, and the recognition and respect for their potential that has heretofore been overlooked. While the mission statements of most districts profess to meeting "individual student needs," in some (maybe many, I hope not most) districts bright students are being held back. They are being told, *"You can't take that course now...."* *"You couldn't have learned and retained that so fast...."* *"It's not fair for you to move on to something new until we have decided that everyone else is ready for something new, too."*

Enrichment and Acceleration

Just as the pyramid provides a framework for discussing and choosing promising practices, the concepts of enrichment and acceleration provide a framework for understanding and using specific methods or strategies for instruction. To enrich means to improve or to enhance. Whether we are motivated by the poor American showings on international test data, or by the complaints of business leaders regarding our untrained national work force, or by the grim realities of turned-off, dropped-out young people in our schools or on our streets, this fact remains: we, as a nation, need to enrich the curriculum. And enrichment should indeed be for *all* students. I would suggest, however, that there are at least two kinds of enrichment as well as two service modes. In addition to enrichment of the content of learning for all students, there is enrichment for *some* students. This enrichment is more specialized, matching learning options to differentiated learner interests and needs. There is enrichment in the

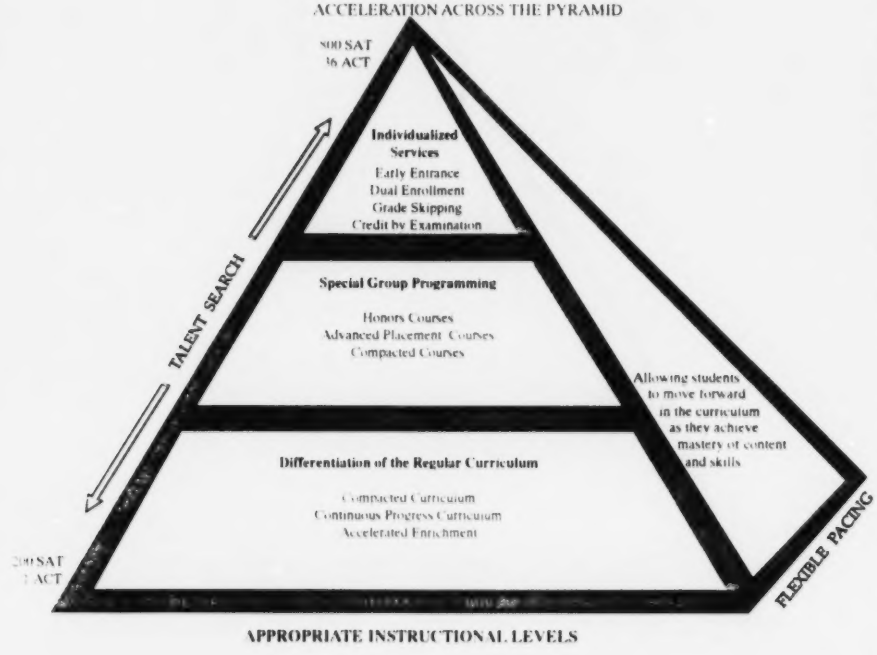
regular classroom and, as suggested by the pyramid, there is enrichment beyond the regular classroom. This is not new. American education was founded on the principle that education extended beyond the four walls of the classroom. One teacher was not expected to teach all things to all students. Not only did students help students, so did parents, neighbors, and the institutions of the community.

To accelerate means to hasten or to go faster. It seems a paradox that we are viewed internationally as a fast-paced nation of people living fast-paced lives, yet we have over the decades slowed the pace of our instruction. A university professor who teaches four years of high school or precalculus mathematics in two years to eighth, ninth, and tenth graders commented, "This is not acceleration. I am teaching them what they are ready to learn and at a comfortable pace for them." He is right. The only reason that we need to talk about acceleration (or, for that matter, enrichment) is that we have students who need to advance to higher levels of learning at a faster pace than the lock-step structure and dummied-down curricula of the schools allow them to do. Until our students are learning at a pace that is both fast enough to meet their own needs and fast enough to meet our nation's needs, acceleration is a necessary educational construct.

Acceleration Across the Pyramid

"Promising" educational practices suggest an enhancement or enrichment of learning. The pyramid encompasses promising practices and, in turn, embraces enrichment. However, promising practices which lead to enrichment without a provision for acceleration will not meet all of our students' needs. The pyramid must suggest, as was philosophically intended, avenues for acceleration. It seems we need to reinterpret the pyramid to show that it indeed embraces acceleration.

Figure 2
ACCELERATION ACROSS THE PYRAMID



As with the original pyramid, the "acceleration across the pyramid" model is just a visual representation (see figure 2). It is up to each teacher, each school, and each educational leadership team to determine the specific practices that would fit within the philosophical framework. Some of the critical elements are outlined below.

First, while each of the support functions from the original Wisconsin pyramid (figure 1) needs to be in place and each will have an impact on the implementation of viable acceleration policies and practices, *flexible pacing* is the linchpin. The original dictum still holds: *Students must move forward in the curriculum as they demonstrate mastery of content and skills*. Second, one proven diagnostic-prescriptive method of talent assessment is the talent search model for finding academically talented students' levels of mastery and readiness through the administration of out-of-level tests (Stanley, 1984). Historically, talent search was a means by which 12- and 13-year-old students who scored at or above the 97th percentile on their standardized achievement tests could take the SAT, or, more recently, the ACT. By removing the ceiling on the test they were taking, a more accurate assessment of their learning needs could be made. However, the use of talent search here is not meant to limit acceleration across the pyramid to the middle grades, nor to students who can demonstrate their potential through standardized tests. The Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) is now being used to assess the out-of-level needs of fifth and sixth grade students (Mills & Barnett, 1992), and the diagnostic-prescriptive process can be applied through any reliable above-level measurement tool at any grade level.

The practices listed under the increasingly specialized instructional levels (figure 2) are meant only to be

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examples. There are others which could be added. These few are meant to show that a faster pace of instruction must be allowed at all levels. Acceleration should begin in the regular classroom through differentiation of the regular curriculum for many talented learners, and extend to the students who are totally out-of-sync, instructionally, with their classmates. The addition of the talent search parameters, 200 SAT - 800 SAT, shows that all academically talented students should have the opportunity to learn at an accelerated pace. The talent search research has validated the appropriateness of varying the means and levels of acceleration.

Most of the listed practices have been defined and discussed in previous publications. Stanley (1976) clarified what is meant by accelerated enrichment when he stated that the more relevant and excellent the enrichment program, the more it calls for acceleration for some students. He explained that relevant academic enrichment contrasts with traditional acceleration because it maintains the age-in-grade lock-step of the school structure. Teachers do sometimes meet the needs of exceptionally talented students through enrichment in the regular classroom, especially at the elementary level, but only when that enrichment is appropriately advanced in pace and level. Rather than moving students up to advanced content, the advanced content is moved down to the students (Daniel & Cox, 1988).

The talent search research has validated the appropriateness of varying the means and levels of acceleration.

Compacting means eliminating unnecessary repetition from the curriculum. In the classroom, it may occur skill by skill, unit by unit, or any way in which the teacher can adequately monitor fast-paced progress. Although compacting may be used to provide time for different content which simply enhances student understandings (enrichment), it can also be used to allow students to proceed to advanced levels of content and skills as they demonstrate readiness (acceleration). In secondary school, or whenever a formal course structure is introduced, compacting can occur course by course. Usually two or more courses are scheduled into the time frame typically allotted for one. Compacted curricula or compacted courses are appropriate for an individual student at the tip of the pyramid. However, the compacted course structure is most often offered for groups of students with similar needs. Thus, it appears at the middle of the pyramid.

Conclusion

Whatever educational paradigm we use, we must always keep in mind that the territory is made up of many students, each presenting us with a different and appropriate educational destination. These students are like dots or destinations on our road maps, and right now, there are many American students who are not being reached. Among those we are not reaching are a great many talented students. The pyramid model is a paradigm for redefining who these students are in relation to their educational needs. Whether they are like the most obscure place on a map, represented by the smallest print, or like the most noticeable place, highlighted by bold print or a star, we need to find or build the roads to get to them. Just as we recognize and value the differences between towns and cities, we must respect and nurture the individual differences of all our students.

The pyramid currently is helping some talented students by illustrating ways to meet their enrichment needs. However, the pyramid was not intended to limit the numbers and types of talented students it served by overemphasizing enrichment. It was meant to communicate the need for acceleration as well. We must now push for acceleration across the pyramid if it is to be effective as a paradigm for change. And, if we choose a different map, the reality is still there: we have students in this nation who can and should be learning more at a faster pace. Excellence in education means getting to all of them. Actualizing their potential requires enhancing and accelerating our curriculum. Promising practices allow us to achieve that goal.

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Ellie Schatz is Executive Director of the Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth, Inc., (WCATY). She was consultant for gifted programs with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction at the time that the state pyramid model was developed.

The Quandary in the Question: "What's the Best School for the Gifted?"

Ellen D. Fiedler

The telephone is ringing again. It's another parent who wants advice from an "expert" on which school (of all of them in the area: public and private, urban and suburban, magnet and neighborhood...) is the *best* school for the gifted. The parents ask: Who is doing the best job? Who really cares about gifted children? Who can they be sure will provide the best for their child?

They think we know; they think we can tell them; they think there is "one right answer" to this question and that we have it. They think we're being evasive (or, at the very least, are simply being "politically correct") when we don't give them specific information—tell them things that will alleviate their concerns and virtually guarantee a successful school experience for their gifted child.

The somewhat painful reality is that even those of us who are looked on as "experts" don't have the "one right answer" to this question. There are several reasons for this:

- We don't know their child.
- We don't know what they value in an education. (And, even if we ask them, this is actually a complex mosaic of contrasting values ranging from concerns about a rigorous curriculum that stresses academic excellence to a burning desire for a warm, supportive climate that will assure that their children "feel good about themselves" at all times...or, at least, most of the time.)
- We don't know everything about every school or school system in the area.

Even when we have become familiar with some of the educational settings where high priority has been placed on providing the most appropriate education for gifted children, things change. Also, variation among schools within even an excellent school system, and within each of the individual schools themselves, makes it extremely difficult to predict the quality of each educational situation.

So, what's to be done?

My best advice to parents is to take the following steps:

1. Ask yourself as many questions as you can about your child and the kind of educational situation you think would be to his or her advantage. For instance:
   a) What is my child really like? (Think about things like personality factors, learning style, degree of giftedness, etc.)
   b) What are my child's interests? What passions do I already see developing that he or she needs opportunities to pursue? What do I really want my child to be able to learn in school?
   c) What kind of learning environment seems to work best for my child? How does he or she deal with challenges? How important is support from adults versus freedom to pursue learning independently?
2. Do your homework. Learn about gifted children, about gifted education, and about what the "experts" think are important factors to consider.
3. Compare #1 and #2 above.
4. Start formulating questions that you want to ask about the schools or school systems you are considering for your child. Write them down, along with a list of the places you want to investigate. For example:
   a) Do you have a gifted program? What is it like? How are gifted students identified? What do you usually do to respond to their needs? How do you feel about grouping gifted students together?
   b) Would you describe your program as being more geared toward academic achievement or to some other goal (such as helping students become responsible citizens, developing critical/creative thinking abilities, or enhancing self-esteem)?
5. Find out who is responsible for seeing that gifted students are provided with an appropriate education (e.g., the program coordinator for the gifted, principal, superintendent, director of curriculum, etc.). Make an appointment with that person so that you can start to get answers to your questions.
6. Always consider yourself as an advocate for your child. You have valuable information that can help the schools be more effective in creating the best learning environment for your child. Without that information, teachers may be fumbling in the dark.

Finally, once a school has been selected, parents need to get involved. Be there and be aware...of what is going on and ways that you can be a productive partner in your child's education. Yes, the "experts" can help you, but only by being guides on your journey to finding the best school for your child.

Ellen D. Fiedler, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the Gifted/Talented Masters Degree Program, at Northeastern Illinois University, and Chair of the Counseling and Guidance Division of the National Association for Gifted Children.

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Kathi Kearney

HE HIGHLY GIFTED

When Promising Practices Go Wrong

Anna, 16 years old and a college senior, unexpectedly drops out of school without telling her parents.

8-year-old Lee, who had been ecstatic about his full-time gifted class placement in September, balks at attending school at all by January.

Jacob, who scored 560 on the math SATs at age 11, turns down an opportunity to attend a summer Talent Search program in order to play Little League baseball in his tiny rural community.

Suzanne's carefully planned grade skip goes awry when a new teacher is hired. The new teacher believes there is no such thing as giftedness, that ability grouping is elitist, and that children should remain with their age peers.

What do you do when everything seems to go wrong? Most parents of highly gifted children struggle long and hard to locate or develop appropriate educational opportunities for their children. These parents must make difficult decisions about their children's educational placements, often with little or no support. If things go wrong, parents of highly gifted children are tempted to blame themselves, the school, or even the child. The important task, however, is not to assign blame, but to try to figure out why a particular placement isn't working, and then find an intervention that *does* work.

Why Things Go Wrong

Highly gifted children present unique challenges to ordinary schools. They are often far ahead of the grade-level curriculum, and are able to learn new things at an astonishing speed. In designing an appropriate education for them, **there is a chance of more things going wrong simply because many more interventions may be required** —interventions that neither the school nor the family has much practice or preparation in making. Grade skipping, subject acceleration, early school entrance, early college, true integration in the regular classroom, or homeschooling are all effective and appropriate educational interventions for some highly gifted children in some situations; they are definitely not the stuff of "how to do it" workshops for teachers or comforting articles in *Parents' Magazine* or *Working Mother*.

Asynchronous development in highly gifted children (Columbus Group, 1991) is another reason why things sometimes go wrong. Like Lee's family, many parents of highly gifted children discover early and often that an appropriate educational placement in September may become a disaster by January. Often this is due to a developmental pattern that is not what child development experts, school officials, and even educators of the gifted tell us to expect. An appropriate placement at one stage of an individual child's development may be wrong at the next stage. Furthermore, we know very little about what constitutes "normal" development among extraordinarily gifted children. The best guide must be the child. It is possible for these children to outgrow a placement developmentally long before parents or teachers are ready to admit it.

The child may have a different idea about what constitutes an appropriate educational experience, and we may not agree with the child's perspective. Anna's parents were dismayed when she left college at age 16, less than 20 credits away from her bachelor's degree, and took a minimum-wage job. Jacob's family felt algebra was more important than baseball. Yet highly gifted children often do know what they need, and we need to let them make some choices — and even some mistakes — on their own. Anna has plenty of years left to finish her degree, and Jacob can always complete Algebra I.

We cannot overlook the fact that **some educational placements or interventions may have been wrong in the first place.** We all make mistakes. When an intervention is clearly wrong for the child, change it immediately.

Finally, **outside circumstances** occasionally can undo an otherwise appropriate educational placement. When Suzanne's grade skip was planned, she was placed with a supportive classroom teacher, certified in gifted education. When this teacher left the district unexpectedly, her replacement entered the classroom with an entirely different philosophy. Such unexpected circumstances as a change of teachers, a change in school administration, divorce, death or illness in the family, financial difficulties, or even the birth of a new sibling can affect the appropriateness of an educational placement. Highly gifted children, with their increased sensitivity (Kline & Meckstroth, 1985), may be more aware and affected by such outside events than we realize.

Educational interventions for highly gifted children need to be reevaluated on an ongoing basis. Perhaps the most promising practice we can implement is to respond continually and respectfully to their unique development, rather than try to force-fit that development into preconceived molds.

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Kathi Kearney is founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children in South Casco, Maine, a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Editor of *Highly Gifted Children*.

IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Too Young or Too Old? (Part II)

In Part I we examined the creative accomplishments of individuals considered "too young" or "too old."

As we ask students to contemplate the roles age and attitudes about our age play in the creative process, the following activities may assist parents and teachers in their guidance of youth.

1. Read biographies of young achievers as well as those who have accomplished much in their later years. Two excellent examples of books are:

   Dennis Fradin (1987). *Remarkable Children*. Boston: Little, Brown.

   Mary Ellen Snodgrass (1992). *Late Achievers: Famous People Who Succeeded Late in Life*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

2. Ask students to brainstorm all the achievements they would like to accomplish in a lifetime of 100 years. Make a timeline that highlights some of the most significant achievements and when they hope to accomplish each.

3. Ask students to complete timelines of the accomplishments of their parents and grandparents. At what ages, young or old, did their parents and grandparents achieve success, marry, or start new careers?

4. Share the following quotations with students. Discuss the quotes and propose that each of them write a story or poem or paint a picture that uses one of the quotes as its theme or centerpiece.

I don't believe one grows older. I think what happens early on in life is that at a certain age one stands still and stagnates.—T. S. Eliot

A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams.—John Barrymore

You are never too young to accomplish something of importance.
—Herbert Swaby

I can get interested in so many things. There is so much to know in this world. And it is such a pleasure for me to learn. Besides, a cultivated man would never say, "I finished my education" because he graduated from college. There is no end to learning.
—Dr. John Morton Finney, age 101, possessor of 11 college degrees

5. Ask youth to brainstorm at least 20 ways that each may prevent the stagnation T.S. Eliot speaks of from entering their lives.

At the age of 96, famed cellist Pablo Casals said: *Age is a relative matter. If you continue to work and absorb the beauty of the world about you, you find that age does not necessarily mean getting old. At least, not in the ordinary sense. I feel many things more intensely than ever before, and for me life grows more fascinating.*

Let all of us who work with young people instill in them some of the sense of wonder at life and its promises—irrespective of age—that Pablo Casals embraced so splendidly. Let the shining examples of both young and older creative people serve as models for ourselves and the creative charges that are our children and students.

Au Revoir

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of several books, including *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors.*

Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

A year's sabbatical in Canada, the U.S., and Europe presented Marc Littler and his family with an opportunity and a challenge. The year would inevitably provide a wealth of enriching experiences, especially for son Jordan. But how should they approach this year away from school? A gifted 10 year old with especially keen interests in the natural sciences, Jordan would have no difficulties being away from a formal school environment for a year, but the Littlers wanted to create a context within which Jordan might integrate the learning experiences that spring from a year abroad while still fostering his skills in areas like math and writing.

Marc welcomed this chance to share the excitement of learning and discovery with his son. *"It didn't seem strange doing this,"* he says, *"because we've been homeschooling all along, in a sense. We've always tried to nurture and develop our children's skills, responding naturally but consciously to their curiosity and encouraging them to explore as fully as possible whatever fields pique their interest. This year was just a more formal, structured extension of what we've always done."*

Before the trip, Marc and Jordan examined the prescribed curriculum materials for the year and set goals according to Jordan's interests that would give him a sense of accomplishment. *"We wanted Jordan to feel that he continued to progress in ways that were satisfying to him; it was important to involve him in the planning process."* Marc focused not only on the content that they would explore in their two to three hours each day, but on ensuring that Jordan acquired related skills as well. For instance, Marc made incremental demands on Jordan's mathematical abilities by giving him tests with time pressures as well as by providing enrichment activities.

"Every couple of months we would take the pulse of our plan, so that Jordan could see where it was going, and we did find that it evolved along the way." In social studies, particularly, the formal curriculum became merely a springboard. *"I found,"* Marc explains, *"that there is no particular unique logic to the curriculum. Gifted youngsters often need to see a larger picture sooner. Because they are so concerned with how and why things happened, because their interests and knowledge often range so widely, they need the chance to develop a historical perspective, to gain the sense of where we've come from and how we got here."* In some ways the most important aspect of the year was being able to change directions when it became clear that Jordan needed to explore those questions.

Marc remembers one incident particularly: *"Jordan became especially interested in the story of Alexander the Great, not only as the greatest leader of the ancient world but also in his relationship with his teacher, Aristotle. We read about them; we found an old movie starring Richard Burton that showed how Hollywood treated the story."* But the highlight came later in Paris. *We were in the Louvre and came upon busts, first of Alexander, then of Aristotle. Jordan, who had his sketchbook with him, was delighted and decided to draw them. What emerged were the most accomplished drawings he's ever done: it was as if he was looking directly into the past, and his interests all came together in that one moment."*

Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

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ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

My mother attended public school in the earlier years of this century. She often told me about the rap across the knuckles with a wooden ruler administered to a child reciting the wrong answer.

Each time I heard the story, I was appalled at such blatant physical abuse, and puzzled as to why every child had to spout the same "right" answer. What about the child who didn't have the ability to answer correctly, and what about the child whose ability was so advanced that her answer was different but not necessarily incorrect. My only solace came from the knowledge that my mother's schooling was in a darker age of education. Surely educators are more enlightened now.

The educational journey through the twentieth century has taken us from the gloom of corporal punishment, elitism and lack of understanding of individual differences through equity and acceptance of varying abilities and potentialities. I have hoped—and believed—that we were close to reaching the ethereal light at the end of the tunnel.

I was almost convinced that our schools were committed to recognizing and understanding the individual needs of all children and that each student would be challenged to his or her full potential. My naivete was exposed when I opened the October, 1992, issue of *Educational Leadership* with its "Overview" by Executive Editor Ron Brandt entitled "Reconsidering Our Commitments." (p.5)

Brandt declares, "I realize now I was mistaken when I pushed a version of individualized instruction in the 1960s and '70s." He continues to say that, during that period, it was accepted that "individuals differed greatly in learning ability" and that curriculum was organized so that students could "progress at their own pace." (p.5)

I'm confused! Isn't Brandt describing what education should be all about? Then why does the concept of individualized instruction and self-directed learning need to be reconsidered? What—and who—are schools committed to, anyway?

If *Educational Leadership's* theme of "Untracking for Equity" is accepted as educationally correct, it would appear that successful program strategies for gifted students must be discarded. I value change, particularly in education, but I also believe in the adage, "If it's not broke don't fix it." The concept of individualized education has been hard fought and hard won, and it's the only hope for many students. Must we go backwards to a period where all children are encouraged to learn at the same level regardless of their individual abilities?

We have traveled a long way in this century from the painful rap on the knuckles. However, we move at a snail's pace when it comes to recognizing what works for children with diverse learning needs.

REFERENCE

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Dorothy Knopper is a private consultant for gifted education in Colorado and the publisher of ***Understanding Our Gifted.***

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Research Awards Available from Mensa

Deadline: December 31, 1992. The Mensa Education and Research Foundation offers Awards for Excellence of $500 each to authors of research papers relating to intelligence or intellectual giftedness. Eligible research must have been published in a refereed journal or presented at a professional conference no earlier than January 1, 1988, and must not exceed 30 pages in length. For more information contact Joan E. Bauman, Ph.D., 4636 Candleglow Drive, St. Louis, MO 63129.

North Carolina's 20th Annual Conference on Gifted Education

March 18-20, 1993. Co-sponsored by the North Carolina Association for the Gifted & Talented, Inc. (NCAGT) and Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education (PAGE), the theme of the conference is, "Back to the Future: A Perspective through Retrospection." Location: Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Conference Center, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Contact Dr. Rick Courtright, (919) 727-2611.

1993 Spring Conference of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children

April 30 - May 1, 1993. Ohio's conference on the theme, "Vision 2000: A New Generation," will be held at the SeaGate Centre in Toledo. A concurrent youth program is a special feature of the conference, with 4 strands for grades 1-12. For information, contact conference co-chair, Anne Nalls, Ed.D., 140 South Grove Street, Bowling Green, OH 43402, (419) 352-3576.

Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness

The first journal on adult giftedness, *Advanced Development* focuses on inner development rather than achievement. Volume 4 on "The Self" is now available. The featured theorist is Roberto Assagioli and the moral exemplar is Peace Pilgrim. One-third larger than previous issues, this volume is packed with articles that will inspire you. ($20 for individuals; $30 for institutions.) See the order form on page 18 or contact ISAD, 777 Pearl St., Denver, CO 80203, (303) 837-8378.

NEXT ISSUE

FOCUS:
PARENT ADVOCACY

ENLIGHTENED ADVOCACY: Developing a Vision for Life
Joan Franklin Smutny

PARENT ADVOCACY: Nuts and Bolts—and Tools
Dorothy Knopper

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January—February, 1993

Volume 5, Issue 3

Enlightened Advocacy
Developing a Vision for Life

Joan Franklin Smutny

A mother whose gifted child had just completed her first few days of third grade described the back-to-school emotional climate in her home as a mixture of hope, anxiety and dread. Ironically, it wasn't the child who was distressed. "It's me," said the mom.

In her role as advocate for her child, this mother found herself going through the same routine every fall with each new teacher. First came the introductions; then the explanations of her daughter's personality, learning style and unusual mix of abilities; then—and here's where the dread set in—the tug of war between what the program and teacher were equipped to offer her child and what she believed her daughter needed. It became an emotionally exhausting, and too often discouraging, exercise in parental support.

Indeed, active support of gifted children and gifted education can be emotionally and intellectually challenging. As mental stamina is critical for the successful marathon runner, so it is for parents and other advocates of gifted children. Ours is not a sprint event; it is a lifetime commitment.

We often think of advocacy as presenting someone's case, defending her, and

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Parent Advocacy
Nuts and Bolts–And Tools

Dorothy Knopper

SCENARIO 1—Over 20 years ago—A public high school auditorium:

"My son is two years old, and he is reading fluently. Please help me!"

I hoped that the seven pairs of eyes that stared impassively back at me did not observe my quaking knees. This moment was my first public appearance as a parent advocate—my debut in what was to become a full-time personal and professional commitment to advocating for gifted children's rights.

My audience was the local school board, inviting citizen comments in a public forum. As I willed my voice to remain calm, I noticed an almost imperceptible nod from one of the seven. I had found a supporter!

SCENARIO 2—The present—My private office:

"Our daughter's preschool has recommended that she enter kindergarten early. She can add and subtract two-digit numbers in her head; she reads at third grade level and relates well to peers, older children and adults. The school district refuses to

(Continued on page 10)

FROM THE EDITOR

Happy 1993!

This looks like it's going to be a good year. Despite budget cuts and strong anti-gifted sentiments still prevalent in the schools, I believe we're going to start to see changes in national attitudes toward the gifted. Whenever the pendulum swings too far in one direction, it has a habit of moving back toward the opposite pole. As the focus in education shifted toward equal opportunity for all, it got carried away on the wrong track of equal outcomes for all, which threatened to totally ignore individual differences. However, individual differences cannot be obliterated by political ideology. Gifted children continue to exist and continue to need differentiated education, whether we are comfortable with that fact or not.

The basis for my optimism is parent advocacy. Parents of the gifted are beginning to mobilize in communities across the country. They have been successful in maintaining mandates and teacher certification in some states, and in restoring services to gifted children in others. As Ann Robinson reminded us in the last issue, it is vital for parent groups to document their successes, their failures, and their strategies. We would be happy to serve as a clearinghouse for information about parent advocacy efforts.

This is actually an ideal time for parent involvement in the schools. Site-based management requires that parents participate in decision-making teams for individual schools. If the needs of gifted children are to be taken into account in site-based planning, parents of gifted children need to be on those committees. Lobbying efforts should be pursued by parents. Now is a good time to strive to attain a federal mandate to protect gifted children. If you are not an active participant in your local parent group, **join now.** If you've paid your dues, but that's about it, become active. Your group needs your help to really make a difference in the lives of gifted children in your community. If there isn't a local group, organize one. We can help you.

In this issue, you will find considerable guidance in your parent advocacy efforts. Joan Smutny and Dorothy Knopper share the wisdom of many years as advocates. Kathi Kearney and Mary Lynn Baum join in the act in their columns as well. We can't moan and groan about discontinued services for the gifted if we don't actively do something about it. This is a time of change, a time for action and involvement. *Please do your part.*

Linda Silverman

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Deirdre V. Lovecky

HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

Suffering Fools Gladly, Part I

In her book, *Children Above 180 IQ*, Leta Hollingworth (1942) suggested that gifted children must learn to suffer fools gladly. This means that gifted children are responsible for being tactful about other people's feelings, particularly when others have made mistakes.

Over the years, in working with many gifted children, I have come to see that what Hollingworth is really suggesting is that gifted children suffer from an intolerance of ordinariness because they are remarkably perceptive. They really do see more and farther than most other people in both meaning and ramifications of events. They often have a clear vision of how things ought to be, being blessed with a conception of truth, fairness and justice which is developed at a young age to a level of understanding far beyond the imagination of most adults. Consequently, these gifted children not only have little comprehension of how ordinary people's minds work, they have little conception of how ordinary feelings feel. They are so intense, emotionally reactive and feel so deeply about so many issues, that they cannot understand the absence of such rich feeling in others. In the passion of the moment, they see everything as larger than life. All things become very important and nothing seems inconsequential. Because so many things are so meaningful, because the gifted child can connect things together so readily, disregarding unimportant details is not easy. To other people it appears as if the gifted child focuses on the tiniest details and gives no leeway for error, and this is true viewed through ordinary eyes. In the world of the gifted child, though, the tiniest things often have the greatest of meaning; by rejecting them one rejects the child, too, because thought and feeling, idea and self are often intertwined for the child.

It is essential that gifted children learn to survive in a world that often will not recognize their unique needs and which will hold them hostage for their differences. Suffering foolishness gladly can be an important means of survival, but it is one that may promote hiding oneself in order to survive. When gifted children are encouraged to remain silent about their own needs and conform only to the needs of the rest of society, they are suffering abuse. They are, in fact, being taught not to trust that there is anyone who can understand them, and in so doing, they never learn how to get others to appreciate them for what they can offer.

The original quotation from II Corinthians 11:19 is "For ye suffer fools gladly seeing ye yourselves are wise." What this means, quite in contrast to modern interpretations of the quotation, is that knowing oneself to be gifted, one can use one's knowledge and empathy to understand the ordinariness of others, and while not adopting this as one's own measure, to see how it is a standard for others. Understanding the measure of ordinary justice, for example, can help the gifted child with a higher measure of justice not expect the same standard of others and decide how to use his or her own standard. This does not mean silent acquiescence to authority, but instead learning to connect to others via one's empathy so as to understand their world while keeping intact a clear vision of one's own. This is not easy, and, in fact, is impossible for some. For example, Barbara McClintock, who won the Nobel Prize for genetics after years of solitary work, was also known for her inability to suffer foolishness gladly. She never accepted the same premises as others. While this made life very hard for her on a daily basis, it enabled her to keep her scientific vision clear. Thus, by focusing on the tiny details that others dismissed as unimportant, she learned the secrets of the chromosomes (Keller, 1983).

In youth gifted children need some people to whom they can tell the truth without fear of rejection or pressure to join the conformity of the majority. While being tactful and careful about feelings, gifted children can learn to question adult premises and so develop trust that some people can understand. Mentoring gifted children in moral areas is also necessary, for by guiding them on the way, gifted children develop the tools to apply their different measure wisely.

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Annemarie Roeper

PARENTING

Feelings Are Facts

Today I would like to introduce you to Lisa's little brother, Larry. He is four years old and, although he seems to be just as gifted as Lisa, he is a very different person. He keeps his thoughts to himself and does not often share his experiences. While their parents can read Lisa, the extravert, like a book, they do not always know what Larry is thinking about. And yet, at times, they read her wrong because they are not aware that feelings are facts. This sometimes creates stressful situations, but Lisa, as outgoing and bright as she is, helps them understand.

Lisa is a lovely child with lively blue eyes, red hair and freckles. However, Lisa doesn't see it that way. "I'm ugly," she says. "Look at those freckles and that red hair. I wish I were beautiful like Betsy. I love her long, black hair."

"That's nonsense," responds her mother. "You *are* beautiful. Lots of people probably envy you. Maybe even Betsy." But Lisa complains about her looks every time she passes a mirror. Her mother gets a little impatient with her. "Oh, Lisa," she says, "there is simply no truth to this. Everybody says you are beautiful."

"Mother, you just don't understand!" Lisa cries and runs out of the room. Lisa's mother does not understand this behavior at all. How can Lisa be so foolish and worry about something that simply is not true. She goes to Lisa to talk to her.

"I don't see how this can be so serious to you when there is really no truth to it."

Distressed, Lisa replies, "Mother, what is truth to you is not necessarily truth to me. You think I'm beautiful and that's fine. But I **hate** having red hair and freckles."

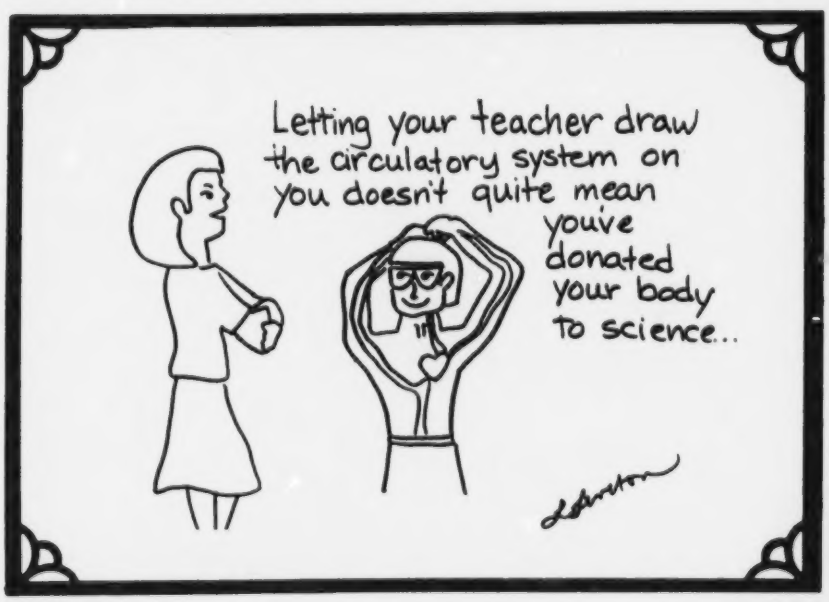
Her mother, endowed with a gift for empathy, suddenly understands. "You're right! I confused your truth with mine. If you don't like your freckles and red hair, then I can understand that your looks make you sad. And if I don't recognize this, it makes you feel alone. I understand now and I hope someday that you will love your freckles and red hair as I do."

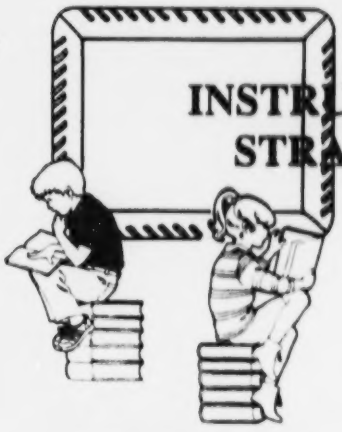
Children, like adults, have many fears and images, which do not seem realistic to others but are real to them. *We must not take away their right to their own feelings for then they feel alone*. Once the common bond between Lisa and her mother is re-established, trust is restored. As time goes on Lisa learns to see herself as her mother and others do and to love and accept herself as she is.

The next night, Larry wakes up screaming, "Daddy, there's a ghost in my closet. He's going to eat me!" Larry is usually so quiet that if he screams like this, he must really be frightened, thinks his father. He has learned from the conversation between Lisa and her mother. He takes Larry in his arms and says, "It's scary to think there's a ghost. I used to be so frightened of them myself, I know how you feel. It took me a long time to believe they aren't real. Try to believe me, but if you can't believe there is no ghost, can you believe that I would protect you from any ghost? I wouldn't let anything happen to you. Can you try to go back to sleep if I stay and protect you?"

And so both parents have learned how to validate their children's feelings.

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life***. Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.





INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Karen C. Nelson

A Reading/Writing Curriculum for Secondary Gifted

It is not uncommon for gifted children to start school with reading comprehension skills at the fifth or sixth grade level. Usually these early readers have not had formal instruction; they have learned to read with a little help from Sesame Street, an older sibling, or by some intuitive process even an observant parent is hard pressed to explain.

Other gifted children may not be reading on entrance to kindergarten but quickly acquire reading skills in a year or two. A highly gifted child can move from being a nonreader to reading high school level materials in one academic year. Even "top"reading groups may provide too low a ceiling for these students' rapidly developing linguistic ability.

Sadly, teachers are not prepared to meet the learning needs of precocious readers. Traditional language arts curriculum focuses, of course, on typical reading development. The journal literature for reading teachers emphasizes remedial needs.

One source useful for parents and teachers of gifted children, *Guiding Gifted Readers* (Halsted, 1988), gives suggestions for an enrichment approach to reading for the gifted from preschool to high school, but the focus is on emotional and identity issues, not on literacy development.

A rich source of contemporary literature that has been under-utilized with gifted students, we believe, is *The New Yorker (TNY)* magazine educational program. Consistent with the whole language approach, *TNY* offers the best of contemporary poetry, fiction, prose and journalism—classics in the making by our best contemporary writers. John O'Brien, who teaches a course on *TNY* at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts writes:

Since its founding in 1925 TNY has become America's leading showcase for outstanding poetry, prose, fiction, humor, and reportage. New Yorker writing is distinctive for its clarity, precision, and depth. (E. Berman, personal communication, April, 1987)

O'Brien has students examine all aspects of the magazine's production, from editorial to advertising and art. However, he admits the first items of perusal for each new issue are the magazine's famous cartoons. Next:

I let the content of the issue dictate the course of our daily discussions...the rewards of scrutinizing a "fresh" story without preconceptions or pedagogical caveats can be tremendously exhilarating—as equals we seek to discover the craft together, knowing that the new writing under discussion today may well become the classic literature of tomorrow.

Reading of the precise, sophisticated models in *TNY* can move students naturally into writing assignments based on the range of forms appearing in the magazine: poems; short fiction; reviews of films, plays, books, musical performances and recordings; political reporting; investigative journalism; humor. The Profiles of noteworthy persons have particular potential for use with gifted students since they profile adults who are arguably "gifted." John O'Brien assigns the Profile as the central endeavor for an Advanced Placement Composition course.

Many classes who use *TNY* as text produce a facsimile of the magazine for their community or school. O'Brien's students call theirs *The Old Deerfielder*. Other teachers find that writing activities based on *TNY* models can produce substantial writing portfolios for students to present to future employers or to use in gaining acceptance to selective university programs.

Through *The New Yorker* Education Program educators can order students' copies at bulk rates: 16 issues, in orders of 10 or more, at only $5.00 per student. (Compare that with the cost of a language arts text or set of trade books.) The Education Program also offers a range of curriculum suggestions, a video, reprints and a newsletter, *Talk of the Classroom*, all available by request from Elaine Berman, Education Program Direction, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036-7440. Call their toll free number: 1-800-223-0200.

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THE READING ROOM

During our last visit the discussion topic was not individual books but censorship. The subject brought up an issue that many parents of gifted children find difficult to handle. The issue is the gifted child's extreme emotional sensitivity and the possibly damaging effect of powerfully written literature.

A parent wrote of this problem recently, explaining that she had gone to the curriculum director of her daughter's school to complain about the language and subject matter of Mildred Taylor's book, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (a book we will soon discuss in the **Reading Room**). Another mother complained that her son was devastated after reading, for language arts class, *Where the Redfern Grows*. I can readily empathize, having cried for two weeks after reading *The Yearling* as a child.

The difference between the first two children and myself, and it's an important one, is that I read *The Yearling* on my own and was, therefore, free to put it down any time I felt the emotional impact too powerful to bear. Children whose grades depend on their reading a particular "class novel" are not free to make that choice.

The Columbus Group points out that gifted children's development is *asynchronous*—intellectual and emotional development proceed at different rates and the impact of one on the other can cause the child genuine distress. [See ***Understanding Our Gifted***, *4*(3)] Further, gifted individuals are likely to exhibit greater than usual emotional sensitivity. Thus we find children in gifted classes (or accelerated in grade level) reading books meant for older children, with subject matter they are not yet ready to cope with emotionally, or children reading age appropriate literature (which may have only a moderate impact on other children) that sends them into an emotional tailspin. What is a parent to do?

To avoid joining the ranks of the censors who demand the right to decide which books should or should not be read in American classrooms, do *not* ask that the class novel be changed, but that the child's sensitivity be taken into account with an alternative assignment. If this strategy fails, consider a little "benign chicanery." If a child is not yet ready for a particular book, let her simply avoid reading it. The chicanery comes in not advertising the fact that the child hasn't read the book. A gifted child who listens carefully to class discussions is likely to be able to take a test on a novel she has not read and still achieve a satisfactory grade—A's are not unknown in such cases. Often a student is able to contribute to the discussion as it is occurring and write a quite reasonable report based entirely on class discussion. (The truth is that with or without parental permission gifted kids have been doing this for years!)

Remember, though, that we sometimes try to protect our children from what they can really handle on their own. Though I cried for two weeks, I did not put down *The Yearling* before I finished it, and would have been incensed if someone had tried to "protect" me from it. On the other hand, I didn't even finish one chapter of *Bambi* and nothing—NOTHING—could have induced me to continue. The child is the one best able to decide whether a particular book is too unsettling. If the child wishes to read a book a parent is nervous about, the parent should read it, too, discussing it with the child along the way. In that way parents can soften the roughest spots and share their own values as the child encounters different values in the vicarious experiences of the book.

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

Lisa Wright

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Child's Play, Part I*

As I entered the classroom of our preschool, several of the children raced past me with a great sense of purpose. As Theo ran by, he called over his shoulder, "I am Jason. We are playing Jason and the Argonauts!" I was not surprised, for this was the same child who was King Henry the Fifth for Halloween and who had persuaded Cassie to play his leading lady, Catherine of Aragon. Whether it is Greek myths, English royalty, space exploration, or even super heroes, Theo's play is always fascinating.

Pretend scenarios such as this repeat themselves frequently among young gifted children. They simply do not play like other children. Given this, what characterizes the play of young gifted children and how can parents and teachers support this development?

It's Only Make Believe?

Young gifted children engage in high incidences of dramatic (pretend) play. These dramatic play episodes are characterized by rich and complex themes. While these children do engage in typical pretend scenarios such as family, school, doctor, and super heroes, they are just as likely to introduce themes concerning knights and dragons, mythology, space exploration, jungle wildlife, fairy tales, and movies. Joshua incorporated the legends of King Arthur into his play, Christina interwove Pippi Longstockings throughout much of her make believe, and David acted out the lifestyles of whales.

It is not unusual for these children to develop play scenarios that extend over a period of time continually adding details and characters until a complete fantasy world has been established. Melissa engaged a group of children in the elaborate development of a story that had a family of mice at the center. This story evolved over many months and was highlighted by drawings, maps, props and costumes. Although the children participated in other themes, the complexity of the mouse scenario satisfied both their cognitive and social needs. One wonders if this is how Walt Disney began.

Creating Castles and Such

While dramatic scenarios provide a foundation for much of the play, elaborate constructions are also evident. A child who is spatially adept may create structures with blocks, octongs, legos, or any other available materials. Such structures are often built over a period of days, reflect careful planning, evidence a great deal of detail, and revolve around a particular theme. Michael was fascinated with trains and built elaborate train tracks with tressels augmented by block structures portraying cities and villages. Working with the octongs, Jennie created a fanciful amusement park complete with a Ferris wheel and a merry-go-round. Activities such as these offer an opportunity for the children to represent their creative ideas concretely.

Group or Solitary Pursuits?

The play episodes of gifted children move back and forth between group interactions and solitary pursuits. A precocious child tends to be very social when there are available playmates who can engage in meaningful, stimulating, and satisfying exchanges. If this is the case, rich and complex cooperative interactions are often the result. However, when such a playmate is not available, the gifted child may opt to play alone. It is important to note that such solitary play is not an indicator of immature development. Rather, it reflects a deliberate decision made by the child to pursue a fulfilling independent task.

Imaginary Playmates

Imaginary playmates maintain a key role in the play of some young gifted children. These playmates may be drawn from fairy tales, mythology, films, or history, or may be an original creation of the child. Imaginary playmates, these children will tell you, are quite wonderful for they enter and exit at the demand of the child, and thereby fulfill a special place in the child's play. Elsa, the beautiful lioness from "Born Free," is one of Hannah's imaginary playmates. When Hannah was in preschool, Elsa was a constant companion. Now, Hannah tells me that although she has Elsa sometimes, she mostly calls upon her unicorns. Though a gifted child readily recognizes that imaginary playmates are pretend, they allow the child complete creative autonomy that is essential in satisfying the needs of a vivid imagination.

The examples above highlight the importance of play in the development of a young gifted child. Informed participation of parents and teachers is essential in supporting this development. Therefore, Part II of this column will provide an overview of such participation and provide practical suggestions that can be implemented in home and at school.

**The children cited are either three or four years old.*

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pleading on her behalf. In the case of gifted children, advocacy almost always focuses on school issues, and for good reason. School is the source of our greatest hopes and fears for the gifted child. We want the program to work for the child. We want the child to shine in the program. Our role as advocate may become that of chief negotiator, racking up promises or concessions from the system—or the child.

None of us can mold a school system to fit exactly the diverse, mutable package of needs that comes in the form of a gifted child, nor of course can we conform the child so that he will manifest only those needs that can be readily met by the program and teacher. We can and must develop balance—a framework for advocacy that will bring rewarding results.

An effective sense of advocacy rallies not only for the needs of the intellect, but for those of the spirit, as well. From this enlightened perspective, we act less as gladiators and more as facilitators. As we help gifted children understand and gain a sense of control over their own inner resources, they develop self-esteem and thereby gain the confidence to pursue their passion for learning. They are better able to build satisfying relationships with their peers and the adults who care for them, because they appreciate everyone's individuality and have learned it is something to be nurtured. We join (not push or pull) the children along the path of intellectual and spiritual growth that leads to self-discovery and self-completeness.

As parents, friends and educators of gifted children, we can encourage this partnership with the child in many ways:

- *In our personal relationship with the gifted child, we can cultivate mutual respect, honesty and trust.*
- *We can be sensitive to their need for praise and encouragement, and foster their self-esteem.*
- *In the child's relationships with others, we can encourage behavior and actions that reflect integrity and compassion. Gifted children often have a keen, innate sense of justice. Although they frequently speak out for their own rights, they may need help recognizing the rights of others.*
- *In school-related issues we can work with the child and educators to identify and articulate the child's needs. The greater the child's self-knowledge, the greater her sense of control and confidence.*
- *At school, home or in the community, we can seek out resources and enrichment opportunities of special value to gifted children.*
- *Among parents, teachers and peers we can serve as resources for information about gifted parenting and the importance of providing appropriate educational opportunities.*

Parents—The Original VIP's

Parents are the child's first and most intimate and influential advocates. From day one, this role is defined as love: respect for a child's feelings, encouragement of self-expression, nurturing of creativity and individuality. These are, of course, lifeblood for *any* child, and the consistency with which we express them is completely independent of issues related to education and schools, even after the child is old enough to begin school. Far beyond the value we place on their academic gifts and artistic talents, these children need first to feel loved. They need relationships of genuine trust and caring with parents and teachers.

Communication Essential

As young gifted children move into formal school settings, parents typically find that the role of advocate expands to include lobbying and diplomacy. On the personal level, this means developing a productive relationship with the child's teacher or teachers. From the beginning, our focus on cultivating a feeling of mutuality and partnership with the teacher will lay the groundwork:

- *Initiate cordial contact before the school year begins, or as soon as possible after it starts, to review your child's situation and discuss the need for appropriate intellectual challenge and support.*
- *Provide a portfolio of your child's work, including samples of writing or art, lists of books that illustrate your child's reading ability or interest, and any other materials that can help alert the teacher to this child's potential.* ***[See Understanding Our Gifted, 5(1),7]***
- *Maintain a relaxed and open line of communication with the teacher. Share your concerns before they become problems. Discuss problems before they become crises. Respond to the positive just as readily as the negative, sending notes of appreciation for special efforts by the teacher, or sharing evidence you perceive that your child is being appropriately served or ways in which your child communicates that he likes the teacher or class.*
- *Collaborate with the teacher to provide opportunities for your child to pursue topics of study in more depth or at an advanced level.*
- *Be flexible! Set an example for your child by articulating needs, contributing to the school community in positive ways, sensitively acknowledging successes, and accepting and learning from personal*

disappointments without harboring defeat or guilt. [See p. 13 for additional suggestions.]

Despite the obstacles that may be encountered, it is essential for parents to keep clearly focused on the objective: nurturing a bright child's individual gifts and talents, and working with teachers to create an appropriate environment in which the child can realize his or her potential.

Teachers: Mentors and More

Teachers sit in a unique position of influence in the lives of gifted children. Typically, parents are first to notice their child's unusual talents or abilities, but teachers hold the key during the child's school year. A teacher who is able and willing can open doors to exciting intellectual challenges for the gifted child and cooperate with parents, become their partner in monitoring the child's progress and meeting his or her needs. To ensure the cohesiveness that is integral to continuity and consistency in the child's ongoing program planning, the teacher can establish the "paper trail" of communication among all of the child's teachers.

> *When we talk, as parents or teachers, we are talking and working and participating on behalf of gifted children everywhere.*

Teachers can never underestimate the significance of the climate they create for all their students, especially for the gifted child. These children can be highly sensitive; like Geiger counters, they quickly pick up on attitudes among their classmates and teachers. Is the teacher's attitude one of genuine affirmation, encouragement and sharing? Do the other students reflect the teacher's attitude?

The teacher, on a continuing basis, shapes and develops the atmosphere in the classroom. Every child needs to feel that the classroom is a safe, affirming environment, a place to originate ideas, explore and grow without penalty. This requires an extra measure of energy and perseverance for the teacher of the gifted, because the child's thoughts and talents can be so expansive.

A teacher attentive to the needs of gifted students can:

- *Make a point of getting to know the talents and special needs of each gifted child. They are all different and require individualized instruction.*
- *Provide a curriculum that works, including catalysts for creative involvement that are appropriate to the child's pace of learning.*
- *Offer rich challenges that demand of the student, but don't frighten — challenges that require the child to stretch and expand, but do not overwhelm.*
- *Offer opportunities for these bright children to work on projects with one another, in pairs or small groups, then share the results with the class.*
- *Maintain a portfolio of the child's work and other developmental progress to serve as a focus for discussion with parents, teachers and administrators, as well as a tool for the child's next teacher.*

Partners for Progress

The parent and teacher have separate roles to play, but their challenges remain similar: to listen to and cooperate with each other, sharing information and insights; to cherish the child; and to appropriately respond to the child's potential and needs.

At various points in a child's school career, conflicts may arise between parents and teachers, due to their differing expectations and opinions regarding the child's needs at various developmental stages. These will try the spirit of collaboration on both sides.

For instance, primary gifted children may have become accustomed to very warm and nurturing responses from sensitive teachers. As they approach fourth, fifth or sixth grades, those "warm fuzzy" ways seem to be replaced by more demanding responses and higher expectations. Parents need to recognize this transition as a normal, positive one in the realm of school life; however, at home a different scenario must prevail. This is no time to abandon nurturing. In fact, children at this age need nurturing more than ever without hovering or smothering. While preserving the established climate of genuine support and love, parents must find ways to nurture that will enable the child to exercise greater independence and responsibility.

Strong Minds Need Strong Values

Character development plays a vital role in our enlightened advocacy of gifted children. Should it surprise us when a child, who seems to learn by osmosis, is just as quick a study when it comes to perceiving the values of the adults around her? Never abandon a child to role models in the media or environment. The gifted child quickly senses whether or not an adult has clearly defined values. It is our responsibility as parents and teachers to be role models who embrace the values of respect, love, caring and sensitivity to others, an appreciation for the environment, and a spirit of positive contribution. However, we

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must not in the name of protection deprive them of opportunities to exercise and test their own developing values. There is a superb proverb I like to share with parents and teachers: *Love without principle is a jellyfish; principle without love is an iceberg.* What is needed is balance.

Helping One, Helping All

This is an exciting time to be a parent or teacher of gifted children. Our work is cut out for us, child by child, but the impact of our efforts reaches far beyond the individual child.

> ***Share your concerns before they become problems. Discuss problems before they become crises. Respond to the positive just as readily as the negative.***

We may start by speaking for our own children, but we never finish there. When we talk, as parents or teachers, we are talking and working and participating on behalf of gifted children everywhere. A parent who works productively with a teacher enables that teacher to see the potential for success with other parents and students. The teacher who makes a concerted effort to tailor her curriculum to respond to the needs of a gifted child shows other teachers and administrators that it can—and should—be done.

Look for ways to be a resource:

- *Share information about gifted education with other parents and teachers. Encourage them to network and spread the word about valuable local programs or exceptional teachers, or to generate support for such activities in your community.*
- *Write letters. Request school board members and administrators to review curricula with an eye to enhancing their responsiveness to gifted children.*
- *Be a volunteer. Special enrichment opportunities are sometimes the only option available to gifted children. Initiate, organize or lead them.*
- *Support local programs and educators who respond to the needs of gifted children.*

Feel Good About Your Child and Yourself

When we view advocacy from this higher perspective, the possibilities seem limitless and the problems surmountable. When we embrace this larger vision of our own potential, we offer it to our children, as well.

In this expansive approach to advocacy, we find joy in the challenge, satisfaction in success and resilience in the face of occasional setbacks. Advocacy becomes more than actions—it becomes a commitment, an outlook, an attitude, and from that standpoint the future holds great promise.

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consider early admission or even to test her because she's only three."

Ruthie's parents had together spoken almost non-stop for an hour, venting their concerns and frustrations, as well as their pride in the abilities of their highly gifted child. They had come to me for advice on dealing with her unique needs and intervention with an inflexible school system.

More than two decades have passed between the above two scenarios. I wish I could say that follow-up from the first has created a "happy ever after" for the second child. I doubt that gifted and talented children will ever move smoothly through our public school system. However, the experiences concerning my son, Steve, created a solid base of advocacy—the nuts and bolts—that can spare parents of children like Ruthie from having to "re-invent the wheel."

Back to the beginning....A positive response from a compassionate board member was the springboard for a successful parent advocacy movement in the state of Michigan. I am proud to report that this advocacy was directly responsible for the first legislation supporting gifted students in that state, a state plan and a state consultant for the gifted, a positive position paper by the Michigan State Board of Education and successful programs for gifted children in school districts across the state. The board member—a parent and vocal advocate of the gifted—later told me, "I've been waiting for other parents of gifted children to come forward."

I, and a handful of other parents with similar needs, posted a notice in our local community library (Where else do parents take their gifted kids for challenge?) announcing a meeting of concerned parents. The attendees formed the Livonia Association for the

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Academically Talented (LAAT), which was to become the strongest chapter of the Michigan Association for the Academically Talented (MAAT). Although initially small in number, the group had a large mailing list (Thanks to anonymous and supportive contacts in the school district!) and a loud voice. In short, LAAT had clout!

Our original supportive board member instructed us in the ways of local politics, helping us to avoid breaches of protocol as novice advocates (e.g., "Introduce the president of the school board before the superintendent of schools."). Her practical suggestion to "offer assistance as parents but defer to the professionals to perform educational tasks" became the philosophical base for our advocacy efforts. We gathered information, made phone calls, organized meetings, offered our support and time to schools. However, we left education to the educators—even though some of us were teachers as well as parents.

Our attitude, both individually and collectively, was positive. We discouraged negativism—not always an easy task when you're trying to eliminate educational practices that aren't working for your children. The old adage, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar," really works. School personnel want to hear what they're doing right for children and not just a list of gripes. By expressing appreciation for positive things ("What a neat classroom!" or "Your smile of welcome makes my daughter feel special!"), we were received with increased confidence in their ability to fulfill our children's needs (Knopper, 1987). Make sure you let your own gifted kids know about this positive approach.

Several critical meetings took place:

- A parent meeting to which the Governor was invited. The Governor declined but his educational aide, an outspoken opponent of gifted education, attended. Our efforts went into gathering a large attendance, and presenting carefully researched information. The attitude in the Governor's office became more positive.

- A meeting, organized by LAAT but advertised under the auspices of MAAT, featuring a panel of state and local politicians, educators and parents, addressing the issue of how to meet the needs of gifted students. During the course of the meeting, a congressman leaned over to a parent and asked, "What's a gifted child?" That congressman went on to become a strong supporter of the first state legislation for the gifted.

- A meeting honoring the brand new school superintendent (who had established innovative programs for the gifted in another state). LAAT parents asked him what his plans for their gifted children were in his new school district before he even had time to unpack his bags!

- A legislative hearing in the state capitol. Educators and parents from across the state presented first-hand information about the plight of gifted children—and the legislators listened.

In 1974 we received a copy of Michigan House Bill No. 5989, the "Education for the Gifted and/or Academically Talented Act," signed by the Governor. The bill defined gifted students and their program needs and established an advisory commission in the state department of education. The goals of a tenacious group of parent advocates were on their way to becoming reality.

And did my own children benefit? Unfortunately, my advocacy efforts were too late for them. They grew up and out of the school system in spite of it and not because of it. So was it all worth it if it didn't help my own children? Just before I moved from Michigan a parent called me and said, "Thank you." "For what?" I asked. "For helping my children to be happy," she responded. Yes, it has all been worthwhile.

Steve, a gifted writer, went to college and pursued his passion through a career in journalism. Although I use fictitious names to protect children mentioned in my writing, Steve continues to give me permission to use his real name. Because of his experiences—and mine, as the parent of gifted children—I am able to share with you these tools to use to tighten those nuts and bolts.

The Goals of LAAT

Continued legislation for the benefit of the gifted child through communication with legislators and school boards on the national, state, and local levels.

Creating awareness of the plight of the gifted child on the part of educators, legislators, and the general public.

Expansion of present effective programs for the gifted.

Development of new and innovative programs.

Sharing of problems, ideas, and solutions concerning the gifted among parents and professionals.

Livonia Association for the Academically Talented, 1977

PARENT ADVOCACY Continued from page 11

Back to Scenario 2...Thanks to parent efforts in many states throughout the years, Ruthie's parents can now find extensive research and resource material on the gifted. Even if their school district has no commitment or funds for gifted education, there is a track record of support established by earlier parent advocacy movements. If they choose to work for their child through an advocacy network, they will find that essential groundwork and credibility have already been established.

Although parent advocate groups have had varying degrees of success in many states, Robinson (1992) warns of the lack of practical research in the area of advocacy, "To date, there have been no systematic studies of the way advocates secure and maintain programs for gifted children... [although] most professionals involved with the establishment and maintenance of special programs and services feel that advocacy is vital to their success"(p.10). *We must document our successes and our failures.*

A more recent success story has taken place in Mississippi. The Mississippi Association for Talented and Gifted (MATAG) carried out an effective public relations campaign, culminating in the passage of the Mississippi Gifted Education Act of 1989. The act establishes a uniform gifted education program and requires local school districts to establish and implement gifted education programs. In short, Mississippi has a mandate for gifted education.

MATAG was the driving force behind the successful passage of this legislation. Parent members of the association were motivated by the urgent needs of the gifted children in their own homes. This parental commitment, combined with an organized, positive and all-inclusive campaign of public relations, led directly to the successful passage of the Mississippi mandate.

"Can You Ignore A Gift?" was the consistent and persistent message to legislators. MATAG disseminated cards with this message, to be sent to respective legislators throughout the state. Supportive businesses donated popcorn, distributed to House and Senate members with a note, "Poppin' with excitement about the gifted bill." "Can You Ignore A Gift?" boxes containing sweet rolls, also donated by business, and thank you notes were placed on legislators' desks.

Effective and knowledgeable communication—with a consistent message—was carried out with parents, teachers, gifted program developers, state leaders and the media. MATAG members established credibility through visibility, unity and a positive approach. As a result, parents were asked to serve on key committees, and effective teamwork took place between MATAG and the State Department of Education.

The passage of Mississippi House Bill No. 746 did not end the work of MATAG, although the group has since changed its name to Mississippi Association for Gifted Children (MAGC). Association members thanked the State Board of Education with a special luncheon and held an appreciation day for legislators, complete with certificates and pictures of legislators with gifted students and parents for local newspapers. MAGC continues to work for continuous funding of the legislation, with alternate plans available if needed. An active parent advocate explained, "We are prepared to compromise as necessary to ensure ongoing mandated funding."

Walker (1991) reminds us of the two parts of parent advocacy—speaking up for your child, and getting support and funds for gifted programs and children. If we don't get involved, "...the massive educational bureaucracy will just go on slogging along in the same old, timeworn grooves" (p. 99).

The Goals of MAGC

Serve the state of Mississippi in the development and improvement of programs for the talented and gifted by keeping parents, teachers, institutions of higher learning, and the community aware of the need to provide appropriate experiences for these students.

Disseminate ideas on programs, projects, and research of the talented and gifted.

Encourage local chapter organizations throughout the state to find and develop facilities for the talented and gifted of their communities.

Serve as a catalyst in the educational growth and stimulation of the membership.

Work for improvement in all areas of education, and for better educational opportunities for all children.

Mississippi Association for Talented and Gifted, 1992

Conclusion

Throughout the history of education in the United States, there has been a love-hate relationship with our field of gifted and talented education. Often it is associated with the limited availability of funds: gifted programs are the first to go when the budget is sparse. The ongoing charge of elitism still plagues our efforts to improve education for bright and creative children. However, when our country needs to promote its educational accomplishments, we embrace our brightest and best and develop them as future leaders.

Delisle (1992) feels that we need not be so concerned about convincing everyone that gifted education is worthwhile. He states, "In a field like ours, on a continent like ours, where issues of equity vs. excellence will always exist, we must learn to live with our critics. Rational people need little convincing that different learning rates require varied educational structures; if thinking individuals disagree with us, it is most often over our structure, not our right to exist" (p. 1). He points out that we should not be bogged down by a "best" delivery system to be imposed on everyone; instead we must realize that "individual student needs should dictate what we do, and how we do it" (p.1).

When our country needs to promote its educational accomplishments, we embrace our brightest and best and develop them as future leaders.

Only through continuing and tireless parent advocacy—for legislation, appropriate alternatives in curriculum, individualized education—can we maintain awareness of our special children and their unique needs. The following suggestions have a track record of success:

- *Be informed about gifted education and education in general.*
- *Share your perceptions about your child with teachers. You know your child better than anyone else.*
- *Be proactive rather than reactive. When a problem occurs, contact the teacher immediately. Don't wait for regularly scheduled conferences.*
- *Be an advocate and not an adversary (Knopper, 1986). Suppress hostility, adopt a positive attitude—and smile.*
- *Go through the proper hierarchy. Express concerns first to your child's teacher, then to the principal, school district administrators, superintendent, and school board members, if necessary.*
- *Offer help: Drive on field trips, work in the school library, share your individual talents and skills (computers, hobbies etc.), volunteer to lighten the classroom teacher's load, serve on school improvement committees.*
- *Be honest with your children and value their opinions. Let them know that you're communicating with the school about their individual needs, and share your advocacy efforts with them.*
- *Encourage a consortium effort to improve education for all children. Go beyond the field of gifted education, involving PTA, business and community groups, media, etc.*
- *Say "Thank you" when something works well for your child.*

[See pp. 8-10 for additional information on communication between parents and teachers.]

Gifted children cannot advocate for themselves. They need a champion, and that's you. One voice can accomplish little, but the combined voices of a parent advocacy group can be heard. Raising a gifted child is sometimes lonely; an advocacy group offers support and the benefit of other parents' successful experiences. It's comforting to know that you're not alone!

If your plan is for one year, plant rice;
For ten years, plant trees;
For a hundred years, educate...

Kuan-tze

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Dorothy Knopper is the publisher of *Understanding Our Gifted*. She has been Colorado State Consultant for Gifted/Talented Education, author of "Open Space" in *Roeper Review* and an instructor at the University of Colorado.

Linda Silverman

Personality Plus

How to be a "Pushy Parent"

One of the greatest fears I have encountered in parents of gifted children is being perceived as "pushy." They are overly cautious about providing appropriate home stimulation, for fear that friends, neighbors and relatives will perceive their child's advancement as the result of their pressuring and overinvestment. Many parents who are also trained as teachers have tried to defend themselves from attack by offering, "I didn't teach her to read. Honest. She did it on her own when I wasn't looking."

Why should parents be afraid of teaching their children anything they want to teach them? It is abundantly clear from the literature that prodigies, MacArthur Fellows and individuals who achieved fame by the age of 35, all had the benefit of rich home stimulation before they were of school age (Bloom, 1985; Feldman, 1986). We know that parents are their children's first teachers, so why aren't they prized for exercising that role effectively? For that matter, why aren't parents prized just for being good parents? As a society, we are quick to blame parents but we are not as good at recognizing and acknowledging good parenting.

Parents of gifted children have been placed in a no-win situation. If they try to develop their children's abilities to their fullest, they often find themselves in an adversarial position with the schools. Schools have a different agenda. The child needs to fit in with the system, to learn to get along with agemates, to learn to do boring work even if nothing is learned by it, because that's the only way she will learn to live in the "real world." And the purpose of school is to prepare the child for that "real world." If the parents assume that the school is right and that their child needs to adjust to the norms of the group, then the child often feels that her individuality is not cherished, that the parents have abandoned her to the needs of the system.

Until there are federal laws protecting gifted children and assuring that they get an education commensurate with their needs, parents will have to bear the burden of being their children's advocates—even when it means being branded "a pushy parent." It is the squeaky wheel that gets oiled. These children are too young to advocate for themselves. In as polite and cooperative a manner as possible, parents need to continue to inform the schools of the needs of their children and to monitor to make sure those needs are being met. They need to get together with other parents so that they don't feel as vulnerable. Strong parent advocacy groups can often accomplish more than a single family.

Perhaps "pushy parent" needs to be perceived as a compliment. *Yes, I am a parent who cares deeply about my child. I care more about my child than about my reputation. I am willing to push the school system to respond to the unique needs of my child.*

Being "pushy" only becomes problematic under the following circumstances: (1) if the child feels pressured to perform for the parents; (2) if the parents look upon their child's education as a means of giving their child an edge in the competition in life; or (3) if the parents do not take into account the self esteem of those from whom greater responsiveness is sought. Only the parents can determine if any of these charges are accurate and need to be corrected. If, upon soul searching, none of these apply, then the false accusations will have to be ignored in favor of the more important goal of making sure their child's needs are being met.

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Linda Silverman, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist and Director of the Gifted Child Development Center in Denver, Colorado. Her latest book is *Counseling the Gifted and Talented*.

Kathi Kearney

THE HIGHLY GIFTED

Advocating for Highly Gifted Children

"We're not likely to see another child at this intellectual level for 20 years, Mrs. Parker. I'm afraid there's not much we can do."

"Children this bright can make it on their own. We have so many children who have trouble learning! Our teachers have to spend their time with these children."

Parents of highly gifted children report hearing these kinds of comments over and over again, from school officials, psychologists, and the general public. Often such comments come at an extremely difficult time, when the families are first beginning to deal with the extensive ramifications of their child's extraordinary giftedness. Nor are such comments unique to the 1990s; more than 50 years ago, Leta Hollingworth (1937) addressed these same misconceptions in her article, "Bright Students Take Care of Themselves." The hard reality is that parents of highly gifted children are likely to be the primary advocates for their children, whether or not they want that role. More often than we would wish, they are their children's only advocates. It is essential, then, that parents play this role effectively and well.

➧ ***Begin by obtaining an accurate assessment of your child's abilities.*** This is absolutely essential. An independent, objective assessment will be worth every penny of the substantial fee it usually costs. The person who tests your child should be experienced in assessing gifted and highly gifted children. At a minimum, the test battery should include an individual intelligence test and an achievement measure. Children who obtain two or more subtest scores in the ceiling range of the IQ test should be retested with the Stanford-Binet (Form L-M), since more recent tests underestimate the full strength of their abilities (Silverman & Kearney, 1992).

➧ ***Work hard to establish a good relationship with your child's school.*** Know what you want from the school. Find someone in the school—a teacher, principal, gifted coordinator, or guidance counselor—who will listen to your concerns and help you advocate for your child. Be polite, tactful, respectful, but firm when an intervention is truly warranted. Don't expect to find the perfect school—it probably doesn't exist—but work hard to make your child's school situation the best that it can possibly be.

➧ ***Provide the school, church or synagogue, and other community agencies, with information about highly gifted children.*** Appropriate articles placed in the right person's hands can go far in fostering a greater understanding of the needs of highly gifted children.

➧ ***Remember that you are paving the way for other families.*** Highly gifted children are more numerous in the population than commonly acknowledged (Silverman & Kearney, 1992). Positive and compassionate advocacy for your child may help other families.

➧ ***Gradually teach your child to advocate for himself or herself.*** As a highly gifted child grows in independence, among the many skills that should be developed are the skills of self-advocacy. Highly gifted children should learn positive strategies to use when they are bored in school, when others tease them, when they encounter bureaucratic hurdles related to their extreme giftedness, or when they are pressured by children or adults to hide their abilities. As soon as they are able and wish to do so, they should have some input regarding the educational decisions that affect them directly.

➧ ***Work with others to establish state and federal mandates guaranteeing the rights of gifted children to a free and appropriate public education.*** Other exceptional children already have this protection under the law. Until this protection is extended to gifted children, gifted programs will always be in jeopardy when budgets are tight or the political and social winds shift. Economically disadvantaged gifted children, whose parents cannot afford private schools or enrichment classes, are most at risk.

➧ ***Finally, take care of yourself.*** Advocacy often feels, and sometimes is, a full-time job. Like parents of children with disabilities, sometimes you will resent the time and effort effective advocacy requires. Build a support system of other families of highly gifted children who understand the needs, frustrations, and developmental issues involved in raising a highly gifted child. Find a friend who will watch your children for an occasional afternoon so that you can have time for yourself. If you are married, strengthen your marriage relationship. Raising any exceptional child puts special stresses on the family. Strong, solid relationships help families weather these stresses and discover the joy that such a child can bring to the family circle.

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Kathi Kearney is founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children in South Casco, Maine, a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Editor of *Highly Gifted Children*.

IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Family Magazines

Media is everywhere today and one of its best exemplars is the magazine. The magazine is not a new or recent invention. According to Charles Panati (1987), author of *Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things*, the magazine made its formal debut in Hamburg, Germany in 1633. In February of 1741, Benjamin Franklin created the first American magazine. It met the fate of many magazines; it lasted only six months. Some of the oldest magazines in the United States that are still being published include *Vogue*, *National Geographic*, *Cosmopolitan*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

While newspapers appeal to broad audiences, magazines are typically more focused upon special interests or particular segments of the population. A study of magazines provides parents with an excellent opportunity to help their children develop an understanding of the infinite variety of patterns productive creativity may take, as well as a look at diversity in society. Magazines also serve as splendid prompts for exercising their children's creativity.

First, parents can sponsor a family outing to a local news agency. (The magazine room at the public library also merits a visit.) Everyone can observe the incredible variety of interests and diversity found among the magazines published in the country. There are magazines for lovers of sports, cats, knitting, food, travel, movies, hobbies, cars, and puzzles. There are food magazines and periodicals for commerce and business. There are political and religious magazines. There are magazines that celebrate the ethnic and racial diversity of society. There are magazines directed to specific age groups such as children, teenagers, and seniors. All family members should spend plenty of time browsing through the rich variety of life celebrated in magazines. If possible, each family member should be allowed to pick one favorite magazine to purchase.

On the trip home from the news agency, parents can lead a discussion about what generic components all magazines share. Children should note that the words and pictures on the cover of virtually all magazines are enticing. Magazine editors lure readers to sample the magazine through promises of informative articles and exciting stories, profiles of famous people, descriptions of wonderful vacations, exciting events, and the like. All magazines have a table of contents that reveal the presented articles and features. A variety of stories and articles enlighten and educate readers about the topic or subject fare of the magazine. Advertising is another common feature of most periodicals.

In addition to determining the common features found in the magazines, each family member should take a turn sharing that which is unique about the publication he or she purchased. What made one magazine more special and treasured than all the others in the news agency?

Once the family is back home all should take time to enjoy and savor the contents of the magazines chosen. Silent time for reading and reflection is a critical part of the total creative process. *(Continued on p. 17)*

FAMILY MAGAZINES Continued from page 16

Meal time is when the creative plans really start developing. Once children have had time to sample the formats and fare found in magazines it is time to reveal the creative project Mom and Dad have had in mind all along. The family is going to create their own magazine. The brainstorming should begin in earnest over the salad and the magazine planning should be well on its way by the time the apple pie is served.

What will the magazine be called? *The Chang Chronicles? The Terrific Thomases? Garcias Unlimited?*

What will the Table of Contents look like? What will the scope of the magazine be? How many articles will each person commit to writing? Will there be photographs? Illustrations? Advertisements? Who will do the editing? When are the deadlines? How many copies will be published? To whom will the family magazine be circulated? To grandparents? Aunts and uncles? Cousins? Neighbors? Friends in other cities?

Once these types of decisions have been made, the creation of a family magazine should be off and running. Parents and older siblings can help younger children transcribe their stories into print. The artwork of even the youngest children will greatly enhance the family magazine. Everyone in the family should have an important role in planning and executing this family project.

Working on Volume 1, Issue 1, of the family magazine over the next several weeks can be a great opportunity for all members of the family to share their ideas, thoughts, talents, and personal creativity with one another and an occasion for receiving positive, confirming feedback.

The completed magazine may feature a photo of the entire family engaged in a favorite activity on its cover. The Table of Contents may have titles similar to these:

Tops in Gymnastics: Linda's Latest Feat
Mom Traces Family History Back to 1500s
Meet Sandy, our New Dog
Ann Becomes a Rollerblade Phenomenon
Origami is for Everyone: Dad's New Interest
Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom: Aaron Reviews a New Book

Given the desktop publishing capabilities many families now have at home or readily accessible, it is now possible to create remarkably professional-appearing family magazines. The finished product can be duplicated at a local photocopy store and then shared with neighbors and mailed to friends and family further away from home.

Time and *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated* are not the only publications that should be found on the family coffee table. *The Chang Chronicles, The Terrific Thomases and Garcias Unlimited!* can also be proudly displayed.

Creating an original, premier magazine is not an activity that is limited exclusively to home and family use. In any classroom, students working in small groups can create their own magazines with topic foci as diverse as teddy bears, nature and the environment, astronomy, soccer, and music. As with the family magazine venture, each participant's creative individual input contributes richly to the whole.

See you at (on on!) the news stand.

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Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of several books, including *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors*.

ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL

A Journal on Adult Giftedness

Gifted children usually have gifted parents. If you are wondering about your own giftedness, subscribe to ***Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness.*** No other journal focuses specifically on gifted adults. Unlike the traditional view of adult giftedness as high levels of productivity and creativity, advanced development in adults is defined as the deepening of the personality and strengthening of human values such as empathy, concern for others, responsibility and integrity.

TO ORDER: *Fill out and return this form to the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, 777 Pearl Street, Denver, CO 80203. This journal is published annually and is available at a cost of $20 each ($30 for Institutions; Canadian/Foreign, $25 payable in U.S. funds).* ***Special Offer: $15 each for two or more journals.***

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Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

Parent Advocacy, Part I

It is inevitably the role of every parent of gifted children to become an advocate on their behalf. All parents ought to be involved at some level in the direction of their children's education, but parents of gifted children have a heightened responsibility in this area. Since most classroom teachers have had minimal training in recognizing and meeting the educational needs of gifted learners, it becomes incumbent on parents, who have an intimate knowledge over time of their children's development and capabilities, to act as informed and assertive—yet sensitive and tactful!—partners with educators.

In an ideal world, this partnership would be a fruitful collaboration, and some of us have been lucky enough to have experienced positive interactions with teachers and principals who truly welcomed our input. Neither we nor they approached our meetings with defensiveness—or at least we overcame those usual barriers. Too often, however, the parent-school relationship continues to be marked by mistrust. On the one hand, teachers may regard parents of gifted children as "pushy," overly concerned with their children, and unaware of the realities faced by teachers in today's classrooms. When we approach with a concern, there is often an implied criticism of their professionalism, which they understandably find threatening and offensive.

We parents also feel threatened, however. Teachers and principals are in a position of power, and we may fear that our very intervention on behalf of our children will be used against them. Our manner of interacting with educators may also be colored by frustration: dealing with an individual or a system that is ignorant about or antagonistic to gifted children sets its own negative dynamic in motion. We may also carry with us, consciously or not, our own negative experiences as gifted children. We need to acknowledge these factors within ourselves but then to direct that energy in more productive ways.

At a recent advocacy workshop of the Gifted Children's Association of B.C., Maureen McDermid, a consultant with the Richmond (B.C.) school district, applied the precepts of conflict resolution to parent-teacher exchanges. Recognizing the factors discussed above, McDermid admonished, ***"Be hard on the problem and soft on the people."*** By focusing on issues, while acknowledging the perceptions and values of the other party, it is more likely that a satisfactory resolution will be achieved.

Advocacy can be more effective, and conflict reduced, if parents and teachers are able to explore the issue and resolve it around shared interests— common hopes, fears, expectations, concerns, beliefs, assumptions, priorities, or values. Parents should also be aware of what words act as triggers to teacher—"boring," "lack of challenge," "waste of time," "not interested," "knows all this stuff," etc. It is important to frame open-ended questions: "What are your concerns? What is your priority? Can you tell me more? What does that mean to you? I'm wondering what you meant when...?" Reframing what you hear in response shows that you hear the concern and allows you to clarify assumptions.

"Above all, advocacy cannot succeed, or even be attempted, if the parties are not talking (and this implies listening) to one another," McDermid concluded. "We mustn't lose sight of the fact that an important element of advocacy is education—helping the other party to understand the issues."

While we strive to develop a positive partnership with our children's teachers and schools, we should be aware of two additional responsibilities: reaching outward to the community and inward to our own families. We will explore these other aspects of advocacy in the next issues of ***Understanding Our Gifted.***

Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

I have a passion. You already know that I care deeply and passionately about children and especially about gifted children. After reading this issue of ***Understanding Our Gifted***, you also know that an important part of that passion is parent advocacy.

Therefore, you understand my excitement as we finally respond to a letter from a parent—received a year ago—for an issue featuring practical information on "how to's" for parent groups and state mandates. In the last issue of the journal, Editor Linda Silverman requested additional information on successful advocacy efforts in different communities. Please let us know what is working—and what is in the works—in your area. In this time of limited resources for education, we need to pull together and share what has worked and what can work for parents and their gifted children.

There's a mom in Colorado who has paved the way for frustrated parents who don't know where to turn. When Gloria's child was ready for school (Gifted kids don't necessarily wait for their fifth birthday to be "ready"!), she was told that no parent had ever requested early admission before. It couldn't be done!

But it had to be done for the highly gifted child in her home. What school district personnel did not know was that, rather than discouraging her, those four words—"It can't be done!—caused Gloria's adrenalin to flow and her battle cry to become, **"It *can* be done. It has to be done!"** And, through persistent and informed advocacy effort, she succeeded in doing it. She established an early admission and acceleration policy for gifted children in her school district. Gloria helped her own child and many more after that.

We are repeatedly reminded that education in the 21st century will be different. Gifted education may not exist as a separate entity. According to Joyce VanTassel-Baska(1991), "...if we are to advance as a field, we shall have to embrace the world of general education, its models and its curriculum reforms."(p.20). Certainly this is true, and I welcome the interaction of our field with the wider area of general education. We have much to offer each other.

But gifted children, with their intense challenge to traditional education, will continue to exist. We will always have to recognize—and to convince others—that their needs are as unique and urgent as the special students on the other end of the educational spectrum. Thus, the need for parent advocacy will be as pressing. I hope that the next century will bring about a productive networking of gifted and general education and parent advocacy.

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Dorothy Knopper is a private consultant for gifted education in Colorado and the publisher of ***Understanding Our Gifted***.

Order Form

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Support Network for Severe Allergies and Asthma

If you are interested in participating in a new support network for gifted children and their families with severe asthma and allergies, please contact Dr. Deirdre Lovecky, 11 Whiting Street, Providence, RI, 02906.

North Carolina's 20th Annual Conference on Gifted Education

March 18-20, 1993. Co-sponsored by the North Carolina Association for the Gifted & Talented, Inc. (NCAGT) and Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education (PAGE), the theme of the conference is, "Back to the Future: A Perspective through Retrospection." Location: Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Conference Center, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Contact Dr. Rick Courtright, (919) 727-2611.

1993 Spring Conference of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children

April 30 - May 1, 1993. Ohio's conference on the theme, "Vision 2000: A New Generation," will be held at the SeaGate Centre in Toledo. A concurrent youth program is a special feature of the conference, with 4 strands for grades 1-12. For information, contact conference co-chair, Anne Nalls, Ed.D., 140 South Grove Street, Bowling Green, OH 43402, (419) 352-3576.

Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness

The first journal on adult giftedness, *Advanced Development* focuses on inner development rather than achievement. Orders are now being taken for Vol. 5, "Valuing the Feminine." Featured is the Stone Center's Self-in-Relation Theory. Leta Hollingworth is the moral exemplar. Issues important for both men and women are raised. ($20 for individuals; $30 for institutions.) See the order form on page 17 or contact ISAD, 777 Pearl St., Denver, CO 80203, (303) 837-8378.

NEXT ISSUE

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HOW PARENTS IDENTIFY GIFTEDNESS IN YOUNG CHILDREN
Barbara Louis, Ph.D.

PRESCHOOLS FOR THE GIFTED: WHAT TO LOOK FOR
Lisa Wright, Ed.D.

All this world is heavy with the promise of greater things, and a day will come, one day in the unending succession of days, when beings who are now latent in our thoughts and hidden in our loins, shall stand upon this earth as one stands upon a footstool and shall laugh and reach out their hands amidst the stars.

H. G. Wells

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UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED®

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

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How Parents Identify Giftedness in Young Children

Barbara Louis, Ph.D.

Ryan crawled up onto a wire mesh chair, clearly made with adult body proportions in mind. He spoke with the careful enunciation of someone practicing a new language. "Mommy, I like my hot dog with ketchup and mustard." He proceeded to eat, kneeling on the chair in order to comfortably reach the table. While he and his mother ate their lunch, they discussed what they would do for the rest of the day and their plans for the next day. Suddenly, Ryan saw some animals in the store across from the restaurant. "Mommy, remember the giraffes we saw at the zoo? They were really neat, weren't they?" At that time, Ryan was 27 months old and had been to the zoo six months before.

When Ryan was in preschool, and was about four and a half years old, his mother remembers taking him to a school friend's house. Ryan had gone there once before, as a passenger in his friend's mother's car. They lived in the country and the directions to get there were long and rather complicated. Ryan's mother, who has a very good sense of direction, commented that she hoped she could find the house by following the directions. Ryan's reply was, "Don't worry, Mommy, I know how to get there!" Ryan's mother

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Preschools for the Gifted: What to Look For

Lisa Wright, Ed.D.

David, four years old, loves to listen to Greek myths and the King Arthur legends. He spends hours acting out the stories clothed in costumes he concocts from discarded pieces of fabric. David's well-developed social interaction skills enable him to engage other children in his fantasy play.

Block building is Josie's passion. She produces accurate reproductions of her neighborhood and is proficient at creating tall, symmetrical towers. When not playing with blocks, she assembles complex jigsaw puzzles or makes characters for her puppet theater. She enjoys interacting with other children, but becomes dismayed when they cannot play the games she proposes. Josie is three and a half years old.

Young gifted children, such as those described above, display precocious abilities and interests that are evident early in their development. These characteristics often present a challenge to parents and educators as they attempt to select an appropriate preschool. When the neighborhood nursery school is not designed to meet the needs of a highly able youngster, parents must undertake a

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FROM THE EDITOR

Happy Spring!

Spring is a time for new beginnings, and so it is fitting that we celebrate young gifted children in this issue. When we think about giftedness as a school-based phenomenon instead of as a life-long set of characteristics, we neglect preschoolers, college students and adults. These three gifted populations have received comparatively little attention in the literature. A widespread myth is that giftedness cannot be identified accurately in children under the age of nine. At the Gifted Child Development Center, we have found exactly the opposite to be true: gifted children's scores tend to be depressed after the age of nine due to ceiling effects, socialization, and other factors. Perhaps future achievers cannot be identified very well in the early years, but developmental advancement and abstract reasoning abilities—the essence of giftedness—are apparent and measurable well before school age. Advanced development can be seen quite clearly in very young children, in their language development, concept formation, curiosity, rapid progression through the developmental milestones, speed of learning, memory, and knowledge acquisition. Gifted infants show greater preference for novelty and earlier development of intentional behavior.

Early identification is essential for *all* exceptional children. In working with disabled children, it has become abundantly clear that **early intervention** is the key to optimal development. The same is true for the gifted. Parents of young gifted children need to have much more information about advanced development in order to nurture their children's abilities fully during the critical preschool years.

This issue of *Understanding Our Gifted* provides guidance for parents in recognizing advanced development and selecting appropriate preschool environments. The characteristics described by Dr. Barbara Louis will also help early childhood educators identify gifted children in the classroom. Preschool directors can use the criteria offered by Dr. Lisa Wright to evaluate their programs and plan more effectively for advanced learners.

Giftedness is not an academic rank nor a place in *Who's Who*. It is an advanced rate of development and a qualitatively different awareness that affect the individual from birth through adult life.

Linda Silverman

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Deirdre V. Lovecky

HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

Suffering Fools Gladly, Part II

Learning to suffer fools gladly means learning to tolerate the ordinariness of life. When one can use empathy to truly understand others, a connection to others is built and mutual tolerance can begin to develop. Tolerance means understanding the differences among people and valuing these differences. Certainly as we look at the world around us, with all the nation states fragmenting into smaller warring ethnic groups, tolerance seems to be in danger of extinction. Since gifted children often are not valued for their differences, teaching them to value the differences in others can be difficult.

One way that some gifted children deal with the problem of their own differences from others is to pretend that such differences do not exist. Tolerating others by emphasizing similarity and ignoring differences means these gifted children learn to tolerate foolishness, sometimes too well.

In their desire to conform to peer expectations, gifted children can become overly tolerant of others' points of view and begin to think that all points of view are equally valid provided one is a nice person. Gifted children, who have developed very high moral standards, make the mistake of assuming that because their actions come from good-hearted motivations, those of others must also. These gifted children do not understand that others may choose to act from pride, greed, pettiness, a wish for power and dominance over others or from a wish to see others suffer, and in fact may even lie about their motivations.

Many gifted children grow up thinking that it is expected that we tolerate all views without question. Unwittingly, then, they may find themselves giving tacit approval to viewpoints they personally find abhorrent. For example, when Neo-Nazi groups force their point of view on others, the gifted child might be misled into thinking that this viewpoint ought to be tolerated also. In a recent tragedy in New England involving a youth identified as a Neo-Nazi, several people were shot. It was a surprise to everyone because despite his belief in the use of violence to achieve his aims, he was seen as a nice person who had "minority beliefs." None of the gifted students nor adults in authority who knew him questioned what might happen were these beliefs to be taken to their ultimate extreme. It was as if they believed that someone who could kill others would not ordinarily behave in a nice, polite way but would act as a monster all the time. That "one may smile and smile and be a villain" is lost on gifted children exposed only to the idea that everyone's view is equally valid and all people are intrinsically good. Because gifted children's points of view are so often not validated by adults in their lives, they come to devalue themselves and put aside their doubts. In the face of contrary evidence, then, they are all too apt to disregard their own feelings and conform to expected standards.

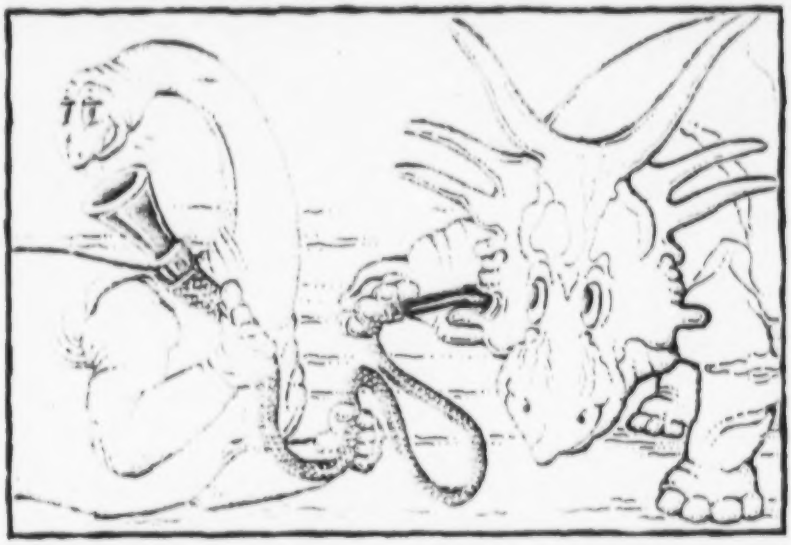
Suffering fools gladly can mean suffering silently, suffering unwisely and suffering from lack of courage. Gifted children need to be taught how and when to stand up for what they do believe, including peaceful challenge of other points of view. It is when we teach children silent acceptance without compassion, without connection to others, and without finding acceptance for themselves, that tragedy occurs.

Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island, and a frequent author of articles on giftedness in children and adults.

Annemarie Roeper

PARENTING

Did Dinosaurs Wear Hearing Aids?



Lisa's parents are a little confused about how to bring up her little brother, Larry, so they decided to consult me. They are concerned because Larry is so different from Lisa, not only in temperament, but also in the way he learns. Lisa did everything quickly and Larry is on a completely different schedule. "Sometimes we think he might be retarded," they confided, "but then he'll say something that astonishes us." Larry is now four years old. Lisa walked at 10 months, but Larry didn't walk until he was almost 15 months.

"When he did walk, did he ever go back to crawling?" I asked.

"No, never," said his mother. "From that day on, he walked as though he had been walking forever." The same was true about talking. "He said only a few words before the age of two, though he seemed to understand us." When Larry did begin to talk, he spoke in complete sentences. "And he would ask the strangest questions. One of his first questions was, 'What holds up the moon?'" He was intensely interested in the solar system and became very knowledgeable about it.

"The nursery school teacher thinks he is slow," his mother shared. "Most of the other children know the alphabet and can write their names. Some are even beginning to read. But Larry has no interest in any of it. We don't know what to think of him and what to expect. And we don't know how to plan for him. Most of all, we don't want him to suffer because his sister, Lisa, is gifted."

I asked to see Larry alone. He spent a lot of time examining everything in the office. Finally, when he was ready, he said: "Why do you have those things in your ears?" I told him that when I got older I could not hear so well anymore and that hearing aids were invented so that sound could be amplified, which means made louder. He looked at me earnestly, thought for awhile, and then grinned: "You're lucky. I don't think old dinosaurs had hearing aids." He chuckled with amusement. Complicated thought processes were involved in his joke. He was not only purposely making a joke but was able to transfer a concept applicable in one situation to one in which it did not really belong and see the humor in it. It was clear to me that Larry is a gifted child. It takes him more time than others to respond because he understands the complexity of the world and needs to truly integrate the information. He looks with enchantment at this fascinating environment.

Unfortunately, in school Larry may not be recognized as a gifted child. He may become a late reader or speller and do only average work in math. No exciting art work. No musical ability. However, he has the most wonderful stories to tell, if anyone will take the time to listen, for he may not be able to write them down for a while yet.

I hope Larry's parents will believe in his giftedness and see that he is special. At school, he may be made to feel inferior for not learning academic skills as fast as others, but he will master academics in his own time frame, making few mistakes. And I predict that eventually he will excel in his chosen field.

It is possible that Larry may never be visibly outstanding in the eyes of the world. No matter what he does with his life, he will experience the world in its strangeness and beauty and ugliness through the eyes and mind of a gifted person. A child who is not gifted would never think about the hearing ability of aging dinosaurs. The controversy over the definition of giftedness has never abated. I, as do many others, define giftedness as a process, which may or may not result in a product. It is not defined by the product.

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life***. Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.

Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

Welcome. Today we share the Reading Room with two fascinating, resourceful, brilliant and dreadfully isolated children. The first is the title character of *Matilda*, by Roald Dahl; the second is the title character of *Henry 3*, by Joseph Krumgold. *Matilda* can be found in paperback at your local bookstore; *Henry 3* is trickier, as this book is out of print and must be found at a library.

Matilda, with a basically sweet nature and a seriously brilliant mind, has coped all her short life with her brutish, thieving, TV-watching, book-hating father and her mean, neglectful and Bingo-playing mother, by escaping into books. (She had read most of Dickens before she was five.)

But driven at last to rage by her family's attacks and complete lack of understanding, she begins to use her mind to devise pranks she can play to get revenge. Thanks to the quality of her mind, of course, her pranks turn out satisfyingly well. When Miss Trunchbull, the Headmistress at her school, adds her viciousness to the force against both Matilda and her wonderful teacher, Miss Honey, Matilda discovers (with a touch of glee) that her mind has powers even more unusual than precocious reading and abstract reasoning. A mind like hers is a dangerous thing to mistreat. This is a book that deals with the highly gifted child's need to be loved by someone who understands and values *all* of what they are, no matter how different. As always, in Dahl, there is a wicked edge, made sharper by Quentin Blake's illustrations.

Henry 3 is very different. Henry is a teenaged boy with a family who loves, respects and cares for him. His problem is not evil adults, but other kids. He dares not let the others in his new school know about his mind or they will, as they have in every other school, shun or attack him. Unfortunately for Henry, Fletcher Larkin learns about his IQ.

This is a fascinating, complex and surprising book. Though it is clearly of its time (it was published in 1967, before feminism changed the culture and when Russia was perceived as our country's primary enemy) its look at both sides of the isolation issue is as important as ever. As desperately as Henry needs to be fully accepted, he needs to learn to accept himself and the limitations of his intellectual abilities. In his search for belonging he discovers he must move beyond his parents and their values, beyond the values of his school and culture. In doing so he finds a friend who doesn't have to have a mind like Henry's to see its value. What the two boys share is the ability to appreciate each other's strengths, each other's whole selves, and an independence of mind that lets them stand against the needs and expectations of others.

Both *Matilda* and *Henry 3* have important things to share with gifted kids who are looking for love, friendship, understanding and a safe place to BE.

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

James R. Delisle

KALEIDOSCOPE

Too Young to be Taken Seriously

When Kerry Thompson was three years old, she began to compose poetry. Since her mind focused more quickly than her fingers, Kerry's mom transcribed her words into print. At age five, Kerry entered her first poetry contest. Sadly, her work was returned to her unjudged; however, a note accompanied her rejected submission: "Please submit children's original work *only*. Obviously, a five year old could not have written this piece."

How frustrating for Kerry and countless other highly gifted children whose work breaks the bounds of typical development. The ultimate insult to one's self-concept, no matter how young or old, is to have talent denied by "placekeepers" whose assumptions are wrong. With Kerry, this was the case; her verbal fluency was suspect because most other children her age did not share her talents or insights.

Parents of children like Kerry are as frustrated as are the children themselves when it comes to being taken seriously. Surely, Kerry's talents are special, but they are not so unique as to make them unbelievable. How can parents and their children cope when adults get stuck in a mindset that disallows excellence before it is "supposed to" be attained? Here are several suggestions.

Encourage your children's efforts for their own personal satisfaction.

Children as young as Kerry often need to release their talents and energies more for self-satisfaction than for recognition by others. Encourage these attempts, and acknowledge how important it is to release one's creative energies in such positive ways.

Locate other children whose talents and interests match those of your child.

Even if these children are chronologically older than your child, such a difference will be of little importance once their "like minds" connect on a common goal. Seek out these talented children through your local or statewide gifted education advocacy group.

Find adult role models who take your child seriously.

One of Kerry's fondest memories was meeting a favorite children's author, Pam Ayres, at a day-long writers' conference. Encourage your talented child to write to individuals they admire, and allow them to participate in community or cultural events that highlight the work of people whose interests they share. Even if they are the only child present, your encouragement to associate with these authors/artists/"doers" will be appreciated.

Provide an ear of understanding.

It can be frustrating to have a talent that is not appreciated by one's agemates. By serving as a non-critical "sounding board" for your child's wishes, dreams and frustrations, you may be providing more support than you know. Be willing to listen, be willing to laugh, be willing to cry; no matter what, take your children's comments or concerns seriously, for that is, no doubt, how they made them.

..Back to Kerry. Yes, her work was finally taken seriously, and at the tender age of eight, she already has her work published by the *Fellowship of Australian Writers*, and she has presented her poetry in the Australian Parliament. As Kerry relates, "I am happy, excited and proud."

..As all of us should be, for Kerry represents just one child among thousands whose work precedes its "expected" emergence. Finally, she is being seen as the creative young poet she truly is.

COLOURS

Nothing!
Not one colour to be seen
Just a greyish sheen
Until.
Softly, the arch of a rainbow appeared
Dancing in the shadows of the grey nothing world,
The rainbow dropped its colours on all things alive
Every colour that it painted helps us to survive.

Kerry Thompson, Age 5
Caboolture, Queensland, Australia

REFERENCE

Delisle, J.R. (1992). Kidstories: *Biographies of twenty young people you'd like to know.* Minneapolis: Free Spirit.

Jim Delisle teaches at Kent State University and is the author of five books, including *Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth* (Longman, 1992).

set the directions aside (knowing she could always refer to them if they got lost) and let Ryan navigate. When they pulled into the driveway, she was amazed. Ryan had gotten them there without so much as a single hesitation, let alone a wrong turn.

Around this same time, Ryan began to read. He was in preschool, but it was a school based on a Montessori philosophy and reading, as such, was not taught. According to his mother, it was as if Ryan woke up one morning able to read. He had always loved books. As early as one year of age, Ryan would take books to bed with him. He never tore or crumpled pages or damaged books, even at so early an age. He enjoyed being read to, but he also enjoyed paging through the books himself. At age four, he could pick up anything and read it. He would then excitedly tell his mother what it was about.

When Ryan entered first grade, at age six and a half, his mother became concerned about his schooling. He had been able to remain in his preschool through kindergarten. Their Montessori approach allowed him freedom to explore his areas of interest. He learned all about dinosaurs and his teacher designed special science projects for him. In order to help him practice his reading and learn to follow written instructions, she would write out each day's activities, which she designed especially for him. He was eagerly learning chemistry and anatomy, as well as math concepts. He also was a very happy child who was sought out by his school mates.

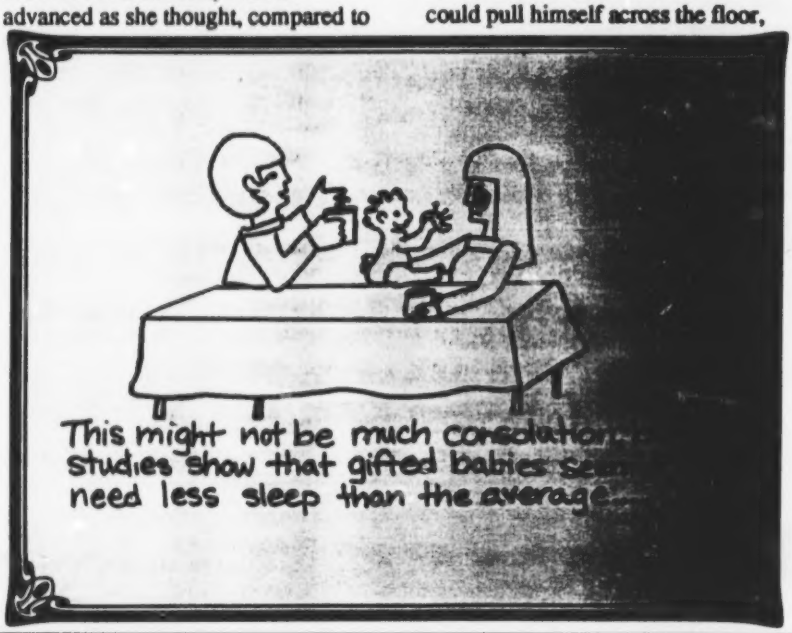
First grade brought a noticeable change. Ryan was placed in a 1st grade classroom in his local public school. His mother sensed that he was quickly becoming uninterested in school. This caused her great concern, as Ryan had always loved to learn. She found herself standing over him, forcing him to complete worksheets dealing with basic reading skills which he had mastered in preschool. She also saw him becoming unhappy and disenchanted with many of the other children in his class. For example, he could not figure out why a child would come up behind him, unprovoked, and punch him in the back, or why children would cut in line at the water fountain. He saw these as social injustices which made no sense to him.

Ryan had begun to play chess and develop a liking for classical music when he was about five. In order to interest the other children in playing with him (he did not particularly like to play soccer), he brought his chess set to school one day. He had no takers other than his teacher. He brought a tape of Beethoven piano sonatas, which he had recorded himself, to "show and tell." Again, the teacher was appreciative. The other children, however, were thoroughly uninterested and began to make fun of him. Ryan finally decided to read alone during recess, rather than play with the other children.

In November of his first grade year, Ryan's mother decided to have him assessed at the Gifted Child Clinic in order to see if he really was as advanced as she thought, compared to other children his age and if, perhaps, this was the reason he appeared not to be fitting in at school. Ryan was administered, in two test sessions, a complete cognitive assesment. This included a standardized test of cognitive ability (the WISC-III) and a test of school achievement (the PIAT-R). Ryan scored a Verbal score of 153 (at the 99.98th percentile), a Performance score of 148 (at the 99.93rd percentile), and a Full Scale score of 155 (at the 99.99th percentile). Ryan's Verbal and Full Scale scores were an underestimate of his actual ability level, as he scored above the ceiling on three of the five verbal subtests. His school achievement assessment showed performance in all areas (information, reading recognition, reading comprehension, mathematics, and spelling) above the 99th percentile. Ryan's school achievement ranged from 8th grade to beyond the 12th grade level.

Early Signs of Giftedness

Ryan had signs of being a gifted child at a very early age. From birth, he was alert and interested in the world around him. As soon as he could pull himself across the floor,



Ryan was "getting into things." His mother remembers how he would pull himself over to an electrical outlet and try to put his finger into it. She would move him across the floor and distract him with a toy, only to watch him head right back to the outlet. She also remembered Ryan as an infant who never slept. From the time he came home from the hospital, Ryan would take 20 minute "cat naps" during the day. Ryan's mother's friends all had hours at a time to do the things they needed to get done around the house, while she seemed always to be carrying a wide awake baby around with her. He was not content to sit or lie still when he was awake; he wanted to see what was going on. Ryan's mother also remembers being highly embarrassed when, around four months of age, she took him to visit her parents for the first time. He refused to be held by either grandparent, acting as if terrified of them.

He began to use single words to communicate his wants at 9 months and combined two words by 12 months of age. By 18 months, Ryan was speaking in sentences. By age two, Ryan's mother could not remember when he could not talk. He could hold his own in a conversation by 27 months. He could talk about what he was doing today, he could talk about last summer's trip to the zoo, and he could talk about what he was planning to do tomorrow or next week. His memory abilities astounded the people around him. He would talk about things he did six months earlier. He showed a remarkable ability to make associations. In asking for a cookie, Ryan would say things like, "I'd like one of those cookies that looks like a moon." His sense of humor also was well developed and he loved to make puns. On his first trip to the beach he commented, "Look, Mommy, the ocean is *waving* to me," and laughed.

Parents Beliefs About Giftedness

Ryan's mother was delighted to find out that she had been right about Ryan. She had suspected that he was a gifted child from a very early age, but she had a nagging feeling that her suspicions might be based on parental pride. After all, she did not have access to very many children Ryan's age on a regular basis. Now she felt that she was in a strong position to advocate for his future.

Parents actually are much more accurate about their preschool gifted children than we might suspect. Sixty-one percent of parents bringing their preschoolers to the Gifted Child Clinic have been found to have children who scored in the gifted range (98th percentile) on standardized assessments. The group of children who were found to be nongifted had a mean IQ in the high average range (Louis & Lewis, 1992). This identification rate is consistent with other research with parents of young children (e.g., Silverman, Chitwood & Waters, 1986). The accuracy of parents' beliefs is important to children's development. There is evidence that parents' beliefs about their children's abilities are directly related to children's ultimate level of achievement (Holloway & Hess, 1985; Johnson & Martin, 1985; McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1985).

Language

What do parents report their gifted preschoolers do that make them think they might be gifted? The majority of parents who come to the Gifted Child Clinic report that their gifted preschoolers have expressive vocabulary skills that are advanced compared to other children of their same age. These parents report that *their children talked earlier, knew more words, and used more advanced vocabulary and more complex sentence construction than their peers.* Language comprehension also is mentioned, however not as often as expressive language abilities. Comprehension is more subtle and more difficult to detect in children than expression. It is seen in infancy when, before children can speak, they are following directions and behaving as if they understand what is happening around them. *By the time a young child begins to speak, expressive language becomes the most obvious vehicle for detecting giftedness.*

Memory

Memory abilities are considered by parents to be as important an indicator of giftedness as expressive language. Parents, on the whole, marvel at their preschoolers' memory abilities, often stating that they speak of events that happened months, and sometimes years, before. Some parents report that, as infants, their children showed fear of strangers at a very early age. Early stranger fear is an indication that infants are able to remember the people they know and recognize someone they do not know as unfamiliar, causing distress.

Abstract Reasoning

Abstract reasoning abilities also are high on the list of skills parents think indicate giftedness. Parents report that their gifted children ask for explanations for rules and comment when they detect errors in logic. "Because I said so!" is not an acceptable answer to them. *These children are able to form connections and make generalizations at surprisingly early ages.* Their advanced verbal skills allow them to communicate these thought processes. Gifted preschoolers also are able to plan and carry out complicated activities, as well as make plans for future events. Some parents report that their young children show what they consider to be an excessive concern about topics such as death and threatening world events. A well developed sense of humor also is mentioned by some parents.

Preschoolers who like to make jokes or make up puns are using their abstract reasoning abilities to play with and test out the language.

Curiosity

Gifted preschoolers are described by their parents as being intensely curious. These are children who, as infants, are very alert to their surroundings and often are not content to be sleeping the day away. They also are difficult to distract from their self-initiated investigations (e.g., checking out electrical outlets). Because of this, they often are difficult infants to parent. As they become older, they show an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Once they begin to read, a whole new resource for information gathering opens up for them. Their desire to learn leads them to ask more questions than most children their age, and their questions contain real substance. They want to know how and why things work and the origins of natural phenomena. One four year old was reported to be very much into earthquakes and other natural disasters. Her quest for knowledge in combination with her advanced abstract reasoning abilities and her lack of experience in the world, however, resulted in an almost overwhelming concern for her own safety and that of her family.

> ***Parents actually are much more accurate about their preschool gifted children than we might suspect.***

Creativity and Imagination

Another attribute that parents of gifted preschoolers tend to talk about is their children's creativity and imagination. *Many of these children are reported to be creative, both in manipulative activities and problem solving situations.* Some of them enjoy art or building activities and combine them with their other abilities. One four and a half year old, for example, dictated poems for her mother to write down and then illustrated them with her own drawings. Others have the capacity and flexibility of thought to see unconventional uses for everyday objects. I am reminded of the father who told me that one day when they could not find the ice trays, his three year old suggested they use an empty egg carton to make ice cubes instead.

Preference for Older Children

Finally, many parents report that their *gifted preschoolers choose older children, and even adults, over children their own age to spend time with.* This is understandable when we consider that gifted children are intellectually more advanced than their chronological age would suggest. This results in interests that they are more likely to have in common with older children than with their peers. The four year old who is learning to play chess is going to have a difficult time finding another four year old to play chess with. Their conversational abilities also are advanced, leading them to seek out older children and adults to talk to.

Emotionality

What sometimes is difficult to remember, but crucial to remain aware of, is the fact that emotionally these children still are preschoolers. Parents often are caught off guard when their gifted preschooler, who has such advanced reasoning skills, disintegrates into uncontrollable sobs because he has been told he cannot eat at his favorite fast food place that night because his parents have to go out. They are tempted to reprimand the child by saying, "Act your age!" Then they remember, he *is* acting his age! What they really mean is, "Act the age your intelligence and reasoning abilities suggest you are." Well, no one can perform at peak all of the time, and sometimes our emotions step in and take over. *When the emotions of gifted preschoolers take over, they are the emotions of a three or four year old.*

Sense of Justice

By the time gifted children reach elementary school, *they often have a heightened sense of social justice compared to their peers (and even some adults).* This can lead them to be less tolerant of their peers' transgressions. Their reaction to these affronts, however, does not tend to be a typical childhood counterattack, which they perceive to be equally unjustified. It also is difficult for them to ignore the affront, because they feel a need to understand and correct the situation. Their reaction often is to cry from frustration or report the incident to the teacher. Neither of these alternatives is particularly acceptable within a typical first grade classroom. The child is labelled as emotionally immature, when actually he is trying to solve the problem or make it go away in the only way he, as a relatively ineffective six year old, is able.

Conclusion

Ryan is an example of a highly gifted child. Few gifted children show advanced abilities in as many skill areas as Ryan. Typical gifted children have skill profiles that show relative strength in some areas and weakness in others. All gifted children need to be recognized so their gifted abilities can be nurtured and their areas of weakness can be strengthened.

Giftedness in children can be seen by their parents at a very early age. Some parents are intimidated by their children's abilities and feel unequipped to do anything to facilitate their development. They even may be embarrassed by the way their children

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seem to outshine the other children around them. Others are very comfortable with their children's uniqueness and enjoy watching them expand their minds and discover the world around them, doing everything they can to contribute to the process. It is the preschoolers whose parents are able to recognize at a very early age that their children are unique; are willing to facilitate their children's development in whatever way they can; and enjoy their children's uniqueness and help them feel good about themselves, while remembering that they still are very young children emotionally, who will have a better chance of becoming self confident, happy, curious school aged children who reach their potential.

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PRESCHOOLS FOR THE GIFTED: WHAT TO LOOK FOR continued from page 1

long and far reaching search for an optimal educational environment.

The time devoted to such a search is valid, for the importance of a child's early years is well-documented (Bloom, 1984; Klein & Tannenbaum, 1992; Montessori, 1965). It is during this time period that attitudes about school and learning are formed. If an optimal educational match is achieved, the child will realize that school is an exciting and challenging place that fosters curiosity, thinking, imagination, and friendships. When such a match is not realized, negative attitudes regarding school and learning that could engender future patterns of underachievement may be developed (VanTassel-Baska, Schuler, & Lipschutz, 1982).

The responsibility for securing an optimal preschool placement for a gifted child invariably falls upon the parents, who must assume the role of educational advocate. This article is designed to provide guidance to these parents as well as to offer a framework to professionals who serve gifted preschoolers. This framework will outline those preschool components that are most desirable for precocious young children.

A Philosophical Foundation

A philosophical mission statement in which a school enthusiastically embraces a commitment to serve young gifted children is essential. This orientation brings with it the recognition that precocious children, because of their unique cognitive capabilities, require a differentiated educational program. Rather than having pre-established, rigid notions of what three- and four-year-old children "should do," such a school will respond to the gifted child in a flexible, appropriate, and individualized manner. It is this environment that will accept, nurture and celebrate the child's uniqueness.

What's in a Name?

Preschools designated exclusively for gifted children are scarce. Therefore, this option will not be available to many children. If, however, such a school is accessible, it is important to keep in mind that the label does not automatically make the school appropriate. Evaluation of the school to determine whether or not it is suitable for young gifted learners is still necessary. The caveat, "Let the buyer beware," is in order here. Some schools designed solely for gifted learners are marginally adequate at best, while other schools, serving a broader range of children, readily meet the needs of this special population.

The Curriculum

The curriculum defines the daily activity of the students and should be guided by a set of explicitly stated goals. These goals should not articulate an accelerated academic curriculum; rather, they should reflect a developmentally appropriate scope and sequence designed to cultivate a love of learning and school and to foster a positive sense of self. For the gifted child, these goals are realized when a balance between child-selected and child-designed activities and teacher-developed and teacher-guided activities is achieved. This combination affords the opportunity to explore individual interests while gaining exposure to a wider variety of ideas. Specifically, ***an appropriate curriculum that provides an optimal educational match for gifted learners should include free-choice activities (play), theme-based units of study, problem-solving strategies, a multicultural perspective, and community service.***

Daily opportunities for *free-choice activities* are essential for gifted

preschoolers. It is during this time that the child interacts socially with peers, develops interests and talents, pursues individual or group projects, engages in dramatic play scenarios, and participates in games with rules. These experiences promote decision making, a greater understanding of self, independence, time management, and task commitment. In short, it is this component of the day that encourages the child to shape the complexities of the environment according to his or her own needs.

A gifted child will become completely absorbed in a pursuit as he or she endeavors to develop complex ideas. Therefore, a 45-minute block of uninterrupted time each day should be devoted to play activities. Provisions should also be made for the youngster to work on a project over a period of days or weeks. These strategies will assure the child that sufficient time will be available for self-directed tasks.

While self-selected activities are essential for the development of young gifted children, their own interests can be further enhanced when teachers introduce new ideas and topics. Interdisciplinary, theme-based units of study integrate an array of developmentally appropriate activities that extend and enhance the experiences of the learners. The selection of topics, which varies from year to year, is guided by the interests of the children as well as the richness of the content. For example, the student's fascination with animals may lead to a unit of study on African wildlife, while another group may be intrigued with the wonders of the solar system. Teacher discretion, however, is necessary in selecting appropriate topics. The children may, for example, like to pursue a unit of study on Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, while the teacher believes that such a topic would not be suitable.

The key to a worthwhile exploration is the depth to which the topic is explored. A superficial treatment of the theme will not reveal the complexities that challenge and intrigue the gifted learner. In order to develop the richness of the theme, a considerable amount of time must be devoted to the activities. A period of eight weeks of a twenty minute activity each day, with optional follow up projects available, may be considered adequate. Yet, the actual time allocation may be greater and should depend on the interests of the children.

The unit's activities must encompass a broad array of disciplines. These areas should include the linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains (Gardner, 1983). Each of these domains must be addressed throughout the unit to ensure the development of the whole child and to introduce the child to a variety of new experiences. Such exposure will afford the learner the opportunity to discover interests and to cultivate a range of talents.

The processes woven throughout the content must reflect a range of thinking skills and creative processes. Activities should strike a balance between discovering factual information (e.g., *What are the endangered animals of Africa?*) and open ended opportunities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate (Bloom, 1956) (e.g., *What can be done to stop the extinction of gorillas?*). Finally, the activities should be related, thereby enabling the learner to make connections from one experience to the next.

The development and implementation of theme-based units of study require a great deal of expertise and time. While the framework will remain constant from year to year, the content will vary with each class. Therefore, teachers must be prepared to let go of the "calendar curriculum" (a curriculum that focuses on the holidays) and the propensity to switch topics every week or two in favor of a responsive, in-depth curriculum, based on the needs and interests of the children. If such a commitment is evident, the potential of the gifted child will be nurtured, and the child will thrive in such a challenging and stimulating environment.

Problem solving, a skill for life, should be developed fully and used frequently by young gifted children as they engage in both free-choice activities and theme-based units. Problem-solving strategies should be woven throughout each component of the school day: the children's social interactions, theme-based units of study, and play scenarios. Continuous and active participation in problem solving cultivates capable and independent thinkers who learn to embrace challenges enthusiastically.

A specific prototype for problem solving should be modeled as the teacher guides the children through the various steps (e.g., Parnes, 1977). This framework should be implemented whenever appropriate in an endeavor to develop this worthwhile skill. For example, if two children want to play

If an optimal educational match is achieved, the child will realize that school is an exciting and challenging place that fosters curiosity, thinking, imagination, and friendships.

with the same toy, the teacher should assist the children as they define the problem, generate several solutions, select a solution, implement the solution, and finally evaluate the solution. If the teacher offers the learners this support consistently, even children as young as three will begin to internalize this process and use it to negotiate conflicts. Indeed, the attainment of this skill will serve the child well beyond the preschool years.

> ***Whatever the placement, gifted children need the opportunity to develop positive, long lasting friendships.***

Further enhancement of the development of life-long attitudes is realized when the classroom curriculum reflects and celebrates the diversity of our changing world by embracing a *multicultural perspective*. An atmosphere that promotes the development of positive gender, cultural, racial, and individual identities must be cultivated (Ramsey, 1987). The topics pursued, the stories read, the play materials available, and the traditions observed must foster a respect and appreciation for the similarities and differences of the children in the classroom community. When such an atmosphere is established, the gifted child will gain a greater understanding of him- or herself and of the world.

Attitudes of social responsibility and caring also must be cultivated early through *community service*. This will establish a lifelong commitment to helping others. Gifted children have a special ability to give to the community, and the seeds for such social action should be planted when the youngster is three or four years old. The preschool curriculum must present learners with ongoing opportunities to participate in events that serve to augment the lives of others. These activities might be as simple as recycling paper, donating surplus party food to a neighborhood soup kitchen, or planting a tree in the park, or as complex as adopting a nursing home and sharing activities weekly. Whatever the form of the experiences, they should not be isolated events; rather, they should be a part of each day so that a caring and ethical spirit is developed in the child. This sense of moral responsibility will serve gifted youngsters well as they become the leaders and caretakers of the future.

Documenting and assessing the development of the child is another critical component of the preschool program. Such assessment should be naturalistic and ongoing and include teacher observations across domains, child work samples, documentations of projects, and language samples. [See *UOG, 5*(1), p. 7.] These data should highlight the child's strengths and weaknesses and subsequently guide the development of the curriculum. A profile of the child should be written based on the information compiled throughout the year. This profile should be shared with the parents and the kindergarten teacher so that a link is created between the child's preschool education and subsequent schooling.

The Teachers

The successful implementation of the curriculum relies on the competencies of the teachers in the classroom. Though it has been debated widely, there is little agreement as to whether or not special certification should be required to teach gifted children. While the actual certification may not be important, certain teacher qualifications and characteristics must be present. These include an eagerness to teach the gifted (not everyone likes gifted kids!), an understanding of learning characteristics of precocious children, a commitment to providing a differentiated, flexible, and responsive curriculum to the gifted learner, and a willingness to facilitate the child's development by supporting the learner's investigations. Further, a teacher of young gifted children must feel comfortable saying, "I don't know. How can we find out?" or "What a great question! Let's write that down so that we can find the answer later," to many of the questions posed. Such responses require a teacher who has a healthy self-concept and who willingly acts as a co-investigator with a three year old!

On a more practical note, it is important to investigate the teacher-child ratio when selecting a program. In general, one teacher for seven or eight youngsters is adequate. If the classroom does not meet this ratio, it is unlikely that the gifted child will receive the individualized attention that he or she requires.

The Children

For many children, preschool is the first formal experience with a consistent group of peers. Given this, the development of social skills is often cited as the paramount goal of early childhood education. The acquisition of these skills depends on mutually satisfying interactions between the children, and the teacher's ability to mediate these interactions. *Since peers are key in supporting one another's social development, it is imperative that a gifted child be placed in a peer group in which he or she can establish meaningful friendships and engage in satisfying interactions.* For a gifted child, this generally means a diversity of children including the availability of at least one other child of equal intellectual and verbal abilities who may even share similar interests. If such a playmate is not available, the child may only experience the frustration of

trying to interact with agemates who do not understand his or her vocabulary, ideas, imagination, or games. It is clear that such interactions will impede rather than cultivate the child's social development.

If the child is not in a school for gifted learners, the availability of meaningful playmates is increased if the child is one of the youngest in a mixed-age class. This will allow the child to interact with older classmates who may offer satisfying cognitive exchanges. If the school does not have this provision, consideration might be given to placing the child a year or two ahead of his chronological age. For some children, this may be the optimal placement. Whatever the placement, gifted children need the opportunity to develop positive, long lasting friendships. When the school recognizes that this is an educational priority, the child will successfully acquire social skills that will serve him or her throughout life.

Parent Involvement

Parents of gifted children have special needs and concerns that must be addressed within the context of the preschool program. Since many of their questions will not be covered by popular child development publications, the professionals at the school must deal with issues concerning the child's giftedness in a knowledgeable and supportive manner. Parent-teacher conferences, both formal and informal, should be available to the parents as needed. If the professionals are unable to offer the necessary guidance to the parents, referrals should be made to relevant organizations.

Parent participation in the classroom should also be encouraged as a means of enhancing the youngster's education. A parent-teacher partnership should be established in an effort to differentiate the child's curriculum and provide a link between home and school. For example, if the class is studying dinosaurs, the child may pursue a related project both at home and at school. Subsequently, this project can be shared with the class. This home-school connection, supported by both the parent and the teacher, will provide the child with a more meaningful and enriched preschool experience designed to meet his or her cognitive needs.

Finally, if the preschool is not a component of an elementary school, parents should be offered guidance in selecting an ongoing school for their child. This selection process is often challenging, and the preschool faculty can offer the parents insight concerning an appropriate educational placement for the child.

Conclusion

The framework provided above outlines the *ideal* environment for the young gifted learner. Unfortunately, few schools match this ideal. However, a school that has some of these components, as well as a willingness to provide alternatives, may indeed be an appropriate placement for a young gifted child. If a suitable program cannot be located, it is still imperative to provide the youngster with opportunities for social interactions, such as a small play group for gifted children begun by the parents. This experience, coupled with enriching activities such as field trips and projects, may offer a viable alternative to a formal preschool program.

Whatever decision parents make on behalf of their young gifted child, it is crucial to remember how important these years are in the child's overall development. Experiences at the age of three or four are likely to set patterns for subsequent development. Such a reality is very persuasive in encouraging both parents and educators to provide the optimal educational experience for these special young children.

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Personality Plus

Let's Ban "Bossy"

As part of our assessment process at the Gifted Child Development Center, we have constructed a very lengthy parent questionnaire which includes the question, "Does your child show any signs of leadership ability?" For the last 14 years, I have been struck with the differences in how parents respond to that question when they are describing their little boys or their little girls. Parents of three, four and five year olds will say about their sons: "He is a leader with his friends"; "He likes to be the boss"; "He's the director of activities—even with older children"; "He likes to suggest a game and then he assigns roles"; "He decides what game to play, who should be what character, what toys to use." But very frequently, they will describe their daughters as "bossy"! "She's so bossy I'm afraid she isn't going to have any friends." Preschool and primary teachers respond similarly, even asking for advice as to how to correct the "bossiness" they observe in gifted girls (Silverman, 1993, p. 301).

Maybe I'm missing something, but I find it hard to grasp how the leadership styles of four year olds could be so different that boys would be described as "the boss" and girls as "bossy." Do young boys really lead in a different manner from girls, or is it simply expected that boys will tell others what to do but unacceptable for girls to do the same? In almost every case in which the term "bossy" has been used to describe a child, that child has been female (Silverman, 1993, p. 302). It seems unlikely that this would occur by chance among 1,700 families. The term "bossy" shows up in the literature also—only in relation to girls (Lutfig & Nichols, 1990; Olszewski-Kubilius & Kulieke, 1989). Apparently the same quality is perceived positively and encouraged in young boys but frowned upon and discouraged in young girls. The message conveyed is that it is inappropriate for a girl to be the boss; she should be a follower instead. The long range impact of having one's bossiness curbed early in life may be a tragic loss of initiative and confidence in one's ability to lead (Silverman, 1993, p. 302).

It seems to me that we need to ban the term "bossy," and encourage leadership potential in young gifted girls rather than stifling it. Maybe our bossy little girls could grow up to be Chief Executive Officers instead of great administrative assistants. It also seems that we need more research to determine if there is a systematic destruction of leadership potential in gifted girls through this deeply ingrained practice of telling girls not to be so bossy. Are gifted young girls only bossy around children of lesser ability? Is there more give and take when they are placed with other gifted girls? Perhaps the solution to "bossiness" is an appropriate peer group!

However, it is perfectly appropriate to give young girls guidance in how to lead effectively, how to honor the feelings and desires of others, and how to build self-esteem in their playmates. Boys as well as girls with leadership ability may need help at times leading in the best interests of all.

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Kathi Kearney

THE HIGHLY GIFTED

The Highly Gifted Baby

Just two weeks old, Daniel already was watching the faces of his parents intently when they spoke to him, trying to mimic the movement of their mouths. On a lark, Daniel's father showed him a box of crayons, held up the blue one, and said "Blue." To his utter astonishment, the baby clearly repeated, "Blue." By 11 months, he learned the scientific names of 30 dinosaurs in a toy set he had been given. At age two, his parents took him to an aquarium with a small pool where young children could touch marine animals. Daniel reached out, grabbed another child's wrist, and gently removed it from the pool, giving the child a lecture about respecting animals and not hurting them. Two years later, as he sat at the supper table eating a piece of chicken, he held up pieces of bone and tendon, asking his mother what they were for. When he realized they were part of what made the animal move, he said, "I think I'm not going to eat this any more," and became a vegetarian.

Daniel's baby brother, only four *hours* old, responded to his mother's voice by lifting himself up off his chest and looking straight at her. The hospital nurse said she had never seen a newborn respond that way.

Daniel's parents were not "hothouse parents" trying to create some sort of superbaby. They were a young struggling couple. His mother was a full-time homemaker; his father, a blue-collar worker. Their children's advanced development was as much of a surprise to them as it was to others, and for a long time they did not fully understand what it meant. Daniel's mother says, "It didn't really occur to us what was happening—we'd never had a child before. We thought we were just a normal family." Until Daniel's mother took a course in gifted education on the way to her bachelor's degree, and encountered a list of characteristics of gifted children, she had no idea Daniel was gifted. By then he was 10 years old. Scoring beyond the norms of standardized tests, he went on to produce original creative work in writing, visual arts, and the natural sciences, and as an adult retains his deep concern for moral and ethical issues.

Information about highly gifted infants is often scattered, retrospective, and anecdotal, although Hollingworth (1926) provided detailed descriptions of the babyhood of five children above 180 IQ and Feldman (1986) explores the infant development of several prodigies. We know relatively little about highly gifted babies because, unlike developmentally delayed or mentally handicapped children, gifted infants seldom have been studied. We simply do not have adequate data about this population.

Despite the lack of research, parents, pediatricians, psychologists, and preschool teachers or babysitters already have access to important developmental information about highly gifted infants that will assist these children now and in the future.

Parents can keep detailed baby books, journals, audiotapes of early language development, and work samples for all of their children. Families with older identified highly gifted siblings are especially encouraged to keep developmental records on a new baby.

Pediatricians can educate themselves on the characteristics of young, extremely gifted children, and provide early support and access to resources for their families. Often the pediatrician is the first person to notice advanced development.

Psychologists who evaluate young, highly gifted children should consider administering the Stanford-Binet (Form L-M). [See *UOG, 4*(4)), pp. 1, 8-10.] In a study of 150 infants, Lewis and Michalson (1985) found that this measure administered at 36 months located many children later determined to be verbally and quantitatively gifted at the age of six.

Because they work with groups of infants and young children with a wide range of abilities, ***preschool teachers and babysitters*** sometimes notice advanced development before parents do. More than one highly gifted toddler has been referred for testing by his or her daycare teacher or sitter.

Neither the political nor fiscal climate supports research on highly gifted infants or intervention for these children and their families. Someday that priority may change. And when it does, such humble materials as a baby book, an audiotape of early language development, or a two year old's work samples may provide essential information that will help many other families. In the meantime, families like Daniel's will continue to nurture highly gifted babies, who grow to adulthood with unique abilities, experiences, and perspectives, the foundations of which were part of their developmental trajectory from the earliest moments of life.

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IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Dramatics, Part I

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Children are great natural actors; they are spontaneous and inventive in their creation of instant drama. From simple movement exercises all the way to full-blown, original, costumed dramatizations, the creative talents and problem solving skills of all youth may be developed and enhanced with creative dramatics activities. Such activities are appropriate whether they occur in a kindergarten classroom, the honors English class for high school seniors, *or* at home. Classic creative dramatics activities may be employed by *both* teachers and parents to develop creativity in young people. The activities shared here are appropriate for use with any age group. Indeed, parents and teachers may enjoy using these games at adult gatherings. All the activities emphasize the importance of utilizing all the senses in both creative and fun ways.

The first activity is called "Who's the Leader?" A volunteer member of the family or a student leaves the room temporarily. Another person volunteers or is chosen to become the leader. The leader is the person who will initiate all future actions. Actions may include such behaviors as snapping fingers, changing posture, moving a foot, scratching the head, etc. All other people in the room will imitate the behavior of the leader. For example, if the leader begins to scratch her neck, all the other people in the room should soon be scratching their necks. All moves and changes should obviously be subtle so as to deceive the volunteer who will be returning to the room, and who will have to use keen observation skills to determine the leader. The game action begins just before the first volunteer is called back into the room; the initial action or behavior should already be in progress when the volunteer re-enters the room. When this observer determines who the leader is, a new round begins with the former leader becoming the next action detective. Play several rounds of the game. It is fun and instructive to debrief after each round with the detective sharing with everyone how the identity of the leader was determined. What clues were used? A watch or clock may even be used to determine which volunteer is the speediest sleuth.

A variation on this activity involves having the family or a class pretend to be watching a particular sport (e.g., a tennis match). The volunteer detective is sent out of the room while those in the room decide which sport to observe. When the volunteer returns to the room, he or she must decide the spectator sport being watched. Other activities in which the actors may be engaged include eating certain types of foods, watching specific television shows or movies, or reading certain books.

"What's been changed?" is another creative dramatics game that accents use of the senses. All participants form pairs and sit facing each other. Each person should carefully examine the appearance of the partner he or she is facing. After a minute or two, all players turn away from their partners and sit back to back. Each partner changes three things about his or her appearance (e.g., unties one shoelace). When all changes have been made, the partners turn to face one another again and their task is to detect what three

(Continued on page 17)

CREATIVE DRAMATICS Continued from page 16

things have been changed in appearance. When this game is played, all players quickly note the importance of being good observers and noting even seemingly insignificant details.

The classic creative dramatics mirror exercise also accentuates the use of the senses. It is also terrific for practicing hand and eye coordination. Again, pairs are utilized. Partner "A" initiates an activity such as applying makeup, shaving, wrapping a birthday package, typing a report, or mixing, baking, and frosting a cake. The action should be exactly mirrored by partner "B" who stands facing player "A" and pretends to be his or her mirror image. After a time, the roles are reversed and partner "B" initiates the action and partner "A" follows this lead. Very careful observation is critical if the resultant action is to truly represent a person and his or her mirror image.

The mirror exercise is greatly enhanced through the eventual addition of appropriate music. Henry Mancini's "Peter Gunn" and "Pink Panther" themes are fun to use as are many classical music selections.

Parents and teachers who want to increase students' vocabularies may creatively use the "Adverb Walk." Invite participants to line up in a circle or in a snake-like line. Ask the children to begin walking according to the adverbial prompts supplied. With younger students, the teacher may need to initially demonstrate adverbs such as "stealthily" but virtually all will understand prompts like these: *joyously, happily, noisily, secretly, nervously, quickly, suspiciously, confidently, hurriedly,* and *swiftly.* Creative teachers and parents will move from the use of just words to the use of a narrative story line. For example, a creative drama coach can retell "Little Red Riding Hood," incorporating ways that both the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood walk through the woods.

Of course, a grammatical point is being made, too. Youngsters quickly realize the suffix most common to adverbs.

We'll enjoy still more creative drama ideas on our next journey.

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of several books, including *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors.*

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Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

Parent Advocacy, Part II

Our last column explored the dynamics of parent-educator relationships. As parents of gifted children, our role as advocates extends beyond the individual classroom. It reaches outward to the community and inward to our own families. We have a responsibility to our children to promote a better understanding of giftedness within both the education system and the community at large. At the same time, we must help our children to become effective advocates for themselves.

To continue to fight the same battles year after year with a succession of teachers, some more and some less open to the insights we have to share, becomes a wearing burden for most of us. The only way that this situation will improve substantially is for teachers and administrators to have a better understanding of giftedness and its educational implications. The attitudinal shift that is needed requires action on many fronts: individual parents "raising the consciousness" of individual teachers, working together to challenge the assumptions of school boards and legislators, risking the raised eyebrows of friends, neighbors, and even family members when we refuse to accept subtle or not-so-subtle put-downs. Difficult though it may be, we have to overcome our reticence—as the parents of children with disabilities have already done—and accept the challenge of educating others about the realities of "growing up gifted."

While it is imperative to work for change, we must be realistic about how quickly or widely perceptions and attitudes about gifted children are likely to change. It is important, therefore, to enable our children to become advocates on their own behalf. This does not mean that we abdicate our own responsibility to advocate for them, when and as it is necessary. At the same time, however, it is critical that we assist our children in becoming more confident about who they are so that they, themselves, can get from the world what they need.

As part of a day-long workshop for parents on advocacy in all its dimensions, Dr. Joan Pinkus discussed the role that healthy self-esteem plays in enabling children to develop this autonomy. Being aware of ways that we can foster self-esteem, like avoiding "Killer Statements," is an important first step. Comments like, "For someone so smart you sure can act dumb," or "With your memory, I don't believe you really forgot! I think you didn't want to do it!" or "That idea isn't new, you know. It was discovered years ago," come out of our mouths all too easily and inhibit the kind of positive interaction which we want to model with our children (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982, p. 130). Simple, honest, remarks that express support of one's children and confidence in them build a positive sense of self from which they can then develop effective coping skills: social flexibility, an ability to express ideas, and a sense of justice. It is central to *our* role as advocates that we assist our children to recognize their own abilities, to express their concerns and their needs, and to enlist the aid of supportive adults as necessary in order to ensure that those needs are met.

Our role as advocates for our gifted children is a multifaceted one—and one that never goes away! We practice it in our partnerships with educators, in our efforts to improve services for gifted students, in our interactions with other family members, and in our late night heart-to-heart conversations with our children. Even as they grow older and assume more responsibilities, they need to know that we continue to be there for them.

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Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

"He learned all by himself. I didn't teach him."

"I don't talk about my child because it sounds like I'm bragging."

"She's quiet and cooperative in school, but she can't wait to come home to do her real learning activities."

The above comments from parents of young gifted children are disturbing in their expression of apology for their children's advanced abilities. Although parents are usually the first—and most reliable—identifiers of giftedness in their children (Silverman, Chitwood & Waters, 1986), they are still reluctant to share their perceptions with school staff or to ask for expert advice. It's uncomfortable to request a conference for the purpose of telling the teacher that your child is too smart for the kindergarten curriculum. It's like making an appointment with the doctor because your child is too healthy!

In my years of working with parents of gifted children, I've never encountered a mother or father who was wrong about the potential they observed in their child. At times parents have had difficulty expressing themselves, but always in some way they have described a spark, a precociousness that simultaneously excited and disturbed them.

They have also expressed relief when they're finally able to talk candidly about their child. One mother happily exclaimed, "We're talking about my favorite subject!"

Takacs (1986) emphasizes that the

> *discovery that one's child is gifted should result in pleasurable anticipation and zest for the challenge rather than a debilitating anxiety that constricts the spontaneity of the most important relationship for individual development, that of parent and child. (p.17)*

Early identification of gifted children is critical. Parents know better than anyone else their children's strengths and weaknesses, frustrations and satisfactions. Parents must confidently share such knowledge with preschool and elementary staff.

If teachers would be willing to listen to parents' unique perspectives and to offer advice based on their professional experience, then the job could be easier for all concerned. If the adults in their lives could communicate frequently and openly, young gifted children would be the winners.

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Dorothy Knopper is a private consultant for gifted education in Colorado and the publisher of *Understanding Our Gifted*.

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FOCUS:
BEING OUT OF SYNC

ARE WE MISLABELING OVEREXCITABLE CHILDREN?
Sharon Lind, M.S.Ed.

SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES: Gifted Kids Who Don't Fit In
Ellen Fiedler, Ph.D.

There are only two lasting bequests we could hope to give our children. One of these is roots; the other is wings.

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Volume 5, Issue 5A

Are We Mislabeling Overexcitable Children?

Sharon Lind, M.S. Ed.

Parents and gifted educators are asked continually to instruct gifted children to conform to a set of societally accepted standards of behavior and achievement—to smooth the edges of the square peg in order to fit into a "normal" hole. Spontaneity, inquisitiveness, imagination, boundless enthusiasm, and emotionality are discouraged to create calmer, quieter, more controlled environments in school. An extension of this trend is reflected in an apparent increase in referrals for medical evaluation of gifted children as "ADD" (Attention Deficit Disorder) or "ADHD" (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). The current medical definition of ADHD indicates that if eight of the following 14 characteristics are present in a child's behavior prior to reaching seven years of age, the child is likely to be ADHD. These characteristics are listed in order of importance; the intensity of each behavior is assessed via checklists and interviews.

1. Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat (in adolescence may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)

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FOCUS ON:

BEING OUT OF SYNC

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Square Pegs in Round Holes:

Gifted Kids Who Don't Fit In

Ellen Fiedler, Ph.D.

Having a gifted child...or being gifted; isn't that what everybody wants? Isn't that the ideal situation, the pinnacle of perfection?

The truth is that anyone who has had a gifted child, has been a gifted child, or has worked closely with the gifted knows differently. Giftedness is a blessing that carries its own burden—the challenges that come from being different, from not "fitting in," in a world that continues to value acceptance and conformity.

Being Different from Others in School

By definition, gifted youngsters differ significantly from others. This often means that gifted students find themselves caught in clashes that result from the interaction between the characteristics that make them unique and the traits of typical school environments. Simply being gifted is enough to make them feel like "square pegs in round holes," creating

(Continued on page 11)

FROM THE EDITOR

Summer Greetings!

We want to welcome a newcomer to our clan of illustrious contributors. Dr. Shirley Schiever, author of *A Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Thinking* (Allyn & Bacon, 1991), has taken over the Instructional Strategies column (renamed Instructional Perspectives). We will miss Karen Nelson; her wonderful contributions to *Understanding Our Gifted* have enriched the programs of gifted children throughout the country. Thanks, Karen, for your thought-provoking columns that have dealt with important issues as well as curriculum and strategies for the gifted.

In this issue, we look at the phenomenon of being out of sync. All gifted children have uneven development and are out of sync with age-grade expectations (see Martha Morelock's provocative thinkpiece in *UOG*, 4(3), Jan.-Feb., 1992). However, some gifted children have particular difficulty fitting into the school environment: children with attention deficits, divergent thinkers, children with heightened intensities, highly gifted children, culturally diverse or economically disadvantaged children, children who are gifted in non-academic areas, and gifted children with dual exceptionalities (such as learning disabilities or emotional disturbance). Giftedness comes in a vast array of colors and shapes, and only a fraction of it finds its expression in academic talent.

In this time of radical changes in school structure, it is possible to advocate for many types of gifted children who have been overlooked and ill-served in the past. Emotional development of children is gradually being seen as equal in importance to their cognitive development. New ways of serving gifted children are also being explored, including magnet and charter schools and various forms of acceleration. Extending Lisa Wright's guidelines for what to look for in preschool programs that best serve gifted children [which appeared in our last issue], Annemarie Roeper suggests criteria for programs for older students. Ellen Fiedler offers examples of how to modify learning environments for the gifted, and Sharon Lind provides a set of questions for differentiating bored gifted children from those with ADHD.

Giftedness does not disappear with age. In her beautiful essay, Lee Johnson shares with us her own experiences both as a gifted person and as the parent of a gifted child. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Understanding Our Gifted* as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to you.

Linda Silverman

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Deirdre V. Lovecky

HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

Out of Sync with Everyone

The gifted child with attention deficit disorder doesn't fit anywhere. While most gifted children show a mosaic of strengths and weaknesses, the mosaic of these children seems to have some pieces missing.

People assume that attention deficit disorder means the child cannot concentrate at all, has little self control and never finishes anything. This is not true, especially for gifted children. It is quite difficult to accurately diagnose attention deficit disorder in gifted children. Very active, intense children who dislike rote tasks are seen as having ADHD when they do not, while daydreaming, unmotivated-seeming children who dawdle and appear very disorganized are often overlooked. On the other hand, gifted children with ADHD can be very intense, talkative, active, moody and seeking of stimulation while children who do not have ADD may daydream and be disorganized. Also, there are a number of different types of attention deficit disorder including those children who are hyperactive (ADHD) and those who are not (ADD).

Children with ADHD/ADD tend to have difficulties in sustaining concentration and attention on moderately interesting tasks, screening out distractions, dealing with frustration, with inhibiting impulsivity, in planning skills and organization, and in self-monitoring and self-control.

The particular constellation of symptoms varies from child to child and can also vary within the same child so that a child may have great difficulty with one kind of impulsivity but much less with another. Also symptoms vary over days so one day a child may seem in control and able to focus but another day may not. This variability fools adults into thinking that the child really can control behavior but chooses not to do so. Finally, many of the behaviors classified as symptoms are also present in highly gifted children though if one looks carefully at how the child expresses the behavior one can see a different underlying substratum to the problem. Thus, the child who does not finish easy assignments may be highly gifted and bored, or may have a learning disability or ADHD or both. That is why careful assessment by a qualified psychologist is so important.

Gifted children with ADHD/ADD tend to be out of sync with everyone. Because they are gifted, they do not fit with age peers any more than do other gifted children. Their ability to reason abstractly, need for mental stimulation, need for peers who share similar ways of thinking and similar interests are similar to the needs of other gifted children. On the other hand, gifted children with ADHD/ADD often do not fit very well with gifted peers either. Their shorter attention spans, tendency towards distractibility and impulsivity interfere with sharing in many activities. In addition, they are often socially and emotionally immature for their age. They can be moody and have a strong need to be in control of every activity all the time. This discourages gifted peers from wanting to be with them.

The cognitive deficits of the gifted child with ADHD/ADD may interfere with academic performance. Thus, the child who reasons well above chronological age may show only mediocre academic achievement. Some children do well on standardized tests despite poorer classroom work; others do well in some academic areas but not in others. This confusing picture of strengths and weaknesses makes it difficult to plan programs which meet both gifted needs and needs for compensatory skills. These children are frustrated both by work that emphasizes rote memorization and work that requires sustained effort to accomplish. Finding the right mixture of challenge and effort is vital, but difficult.

Attention deficit disorder produces difficulties in academic, emotional and social areas. These gifted children need special understanding and programming in order to meet their disparate needs.

This topic will be explored further in a future article.

Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island, and a frequent author of articles on giftedness in children and adults.

Annemarie Roeper

PARENTING

Who Will Educate My Gifted Child?

In this period of tightened budgets, many educational programs are being cut in our nation's public schools. This situation forces educators to act on their priorities, many of which have been hidden from view during more prosperous times. Gifted programs are among the first to be cut, followed by art and music, while athletic activities usually survive hard times. Parents of gifted children, therefore, feel increasingly obliged to look toward private institutions to educate their children. But they are often confused about what to look for in a school. The following conversation has occurred repeatedly in my consultation service for the gifted:

John's mother had traveled many miles from a large city to see me. When I told her that her son had many characteristics of the gifted, she did not look pleased.

"Do you think I should believe him that his trouble in school is caused by his boredom and that his resistance to homework is justified because it is simply too easy?" she asked.

"I am sure that an unchallenging program is contributing to his difficulties and you need to plan accordingly," I replied.

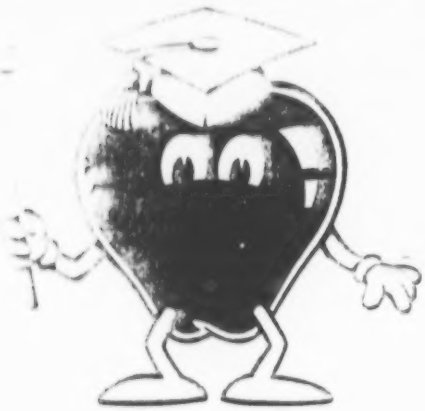
"But I don't know what to do. There used to be a pullout class for the gifted beginning in third grade, which is where Johnny will be next year, but this has been cut because of lack of money. We really can't afford a private school, but maybe with help from his grandparents we might have to try it. There are a number of private schools in our area but no schools for the gifted. What type of school should I look for? We have Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, some schools with open classrooms, some with a strong traditional, competitive approach. Which do you recommend?"

There is no easy answer. It depends on the individual child, the attitude of the administration and teachers. Here are some of the factors to take into account when you try to make a decision:

Are there other gifted children in the classroom?
Do teachers seem to understand and enjoy gifted children?
Are they aware of and willing to serve the unique needs of gifted children?
Can the child proceed at his or her own speed?
Is the program flexible?
Does it include concept learning as well as skill learning?
Does it include freedom of choice?
Does it leave room for individual initiative and group or personal projects?
Does it involve the inquiry method —allowing the child to find the information rather than presenting facts to the child?
Is a library available?
Are science, art, music, dance and drama included in the program?
Are there field trips?
Are attention and time available for conflict resolution and development of relationships among children?
Do children and parents participate in decision making?
Do you feel that the administration shows an openness toward parents?

Locating a school which fits these prerequisites may take a great deal of research. It is helpful to confer with other parents of gifted children and compare observations. *In my next column, I will address the issues involved for gifted children in going through the admissions procedures.*

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life.*** Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.



INSTRUCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Facilitating Emotional Development of the Gifted

All curriculum and instruction should be based on the needs of the learners, as indicated by their characteristics. However, many instructional decisions are based on available materials, textbooks, and staff, rather than on learning needs. Gifted students, whose cognitive complexity is accompanied by emotional depth (Silverman, 1993), may be short-changed seriously when curriculum does not meet their intellectual needs, but also denies or ignores their emotional capacities. In this column I will explore briefly how (some of) these emotional needs can be met within the school setting and in the home.

Gifted people are strongly motivated by self-actualization needs (Clark, 1983), that is to develop their potential. Self-actualization is the process of becoming all one can be, and it can be supported or thwarted by the environment. The challenge for parents and educators is to find ways to support the necessary and often painful emotional growth of the child.

Self-discovery and acceptance of the self are critical. Discovery of the self may be nurtured through comments and questions such as, "You seem to be touched by classical music. I notice that frequently you stop what you are doing and appear to be swept up by Mozart's music. What do you especially enjoy about the music?" Commenting on individual response or behavior and inviting children to enter a discussion may assist them in clarifying their own uniqueness.

Emotional growth also can occur during times of turmoil. Such opportunities arise when a child is extremely frustrated and agitated over perceived shortcomings. Accepting and acknowledging the frustration and the vision of perfection in the mind of the child is important. Responses such as, "I understand how frustrated you feel. Are you trying to make it just like the picture?" identify the source of the frustration and invite response or discussion. This validates the child's perception of the problem and offers a model for dealing with frustration.

Curricula for gifted students should include learning about and discussing human emotions and personal growth as part of the study of history, eminent people, and contemporary events. The human side of history and the angst of leaders must be explored and discussed. By learning of the inner conflicts and doubts of others, children see that such feelings and thoughts are normal for some people and that significant accomplishment and personal growth may come from the depths of despair or the pain of determining the right or at least better choice.

Time must be allowed for personal reflection and the exploration of personal reactions to experiences. Journaling offers time for reflection and recording of striking or interesting ideas and personal reactions. A class discussion or an intriguing question may frame journal entries, or time simply may be given for reflection and writing.

Parents and teachers of the gifted need to be aware of the potential for emotional development that usually accompanies superior intelligence. This awareness is necessary but not sufficient to nurture and enhance self-actualization for the child. Sensitive questions and responses and opportunities to learn of others' struggles to become self-actualized offer models and a nurturing environment in which self-actualization can take place.

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Shirley W. Schiever, Ph.D., is a curriculum specialist at the Fine Arts Magnet School in Tucson, Arizona, and the author of *Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Thinking*.

Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

Welcome to the reading room. This time we devote our space to one author, a very special man who writes very special books, rich and complex no matter how simple and direct they appear to be. Clyde Robert Bulla (whose *The Chalk Box Kid* was the "literarily nutritious first chapter book" discussed in Reading Room #14, *UOG, 3*(2), p.6) was born in 1914 and continues to write for children of various ages. For parents and others who are looking for books that aren't "too big" for precocious readers but aren't "too simple," either, Bulla's first chapter books are ideal. It isn't only that the vocabulary isn't limited; it's that the subjects are not treated with shallow simplicity. Well aware of the joys, griefs, complications and difficulties of human life, Clyde Bulla manages to deal with them all.

A Grain of Wheat, A Writer Begins is a splendid introduction to biography for the youngest readers. In "first chapter book" format (ten chapters of two to three pages each) Bulla tells the story of his early childhood, and how he knew he wanted to be a writer. It's a reminiscence that, like his fiction, includes not just the happy times, but the difficult ones as well.

He shares with the reader the joys of Missouri farm life before World War I (skating and sledding and riding to town in the horsecart), the amazing day his father taught him to swim, the first day of school in a one room school house with his older sister as teacher, and the special joy of Christmas the year he'd nearly died from being kicked in the head by a horse. And he shares as well, the sadder times, the loss of his dog, the cutting down of his favorite sycamore tree, his guilt at nearly burning his house down, and the bitter melancholy of parents not happy with the choices they had made in life, but unable to change them. This is *real* life, even though by the end he is only approaching the fifth grade.

The title of the book is the title of his first successful story, written on his own, and entered in a newspaper contest (he wrote it, copied it neatly, and mailed it all by himself) in spite of his family's assurances that he could never really be a writer. No, he didn't win the $100 first prize, or one of the five second prizes of $20. But he *did* win one of the 100 $1 third prizes. No one but himself was very impressed. But Clyde Bulla knew from that moment on that he was a writer. And so he has been all seventy years since.

White Bird is another of Bulla's first chapter books: historical fiction set in Tennessee in 1797. Luke Vail, a lonely farmer, discovers an abandoned baby, and, with the help of neighbors, raises him. When the neighbors move west, Luke hides John Thomas, now four, so they won't take him with them. The two have only each other as John Thomas grows and becomes more and more curious about the rest of the world, less and less happy with their lonely existence. When John Thomas finds an albino crow with a broken wing and saves its life, the parallel story takes the reader into suspense and adventure in this tale of love and loss, loyalty and betrayal. It's a bittersweet book very young children can read on their own and parents will enjoy and want to discuss with them.

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

Lisa Wright

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Child's Play, Part II

I DO Believe! The Value of Play

Perhaps the most important variable in supporting a child's play is the parents' belief that play is a valuable and worthwhile activity. In an age where parents are urged to enroll their child in a variety of enrichment classes as well as take a number of educational excursions, play is often crowded out of the child's day. A parent who values play will be certain to provide a period of uninterrupted time each day for the child to engage in self-selected activities either alone or with friends. It is the predictable scheduling of such time that will enable the child to develop the elaborate play episodes that are essential to his or her development.

"Meaningful Friends"

Young gifted children enjoy interacting with "true peers." That is, playmates who are not only similar in age, but who also have comparable intellectual abilities and interests. As one preschooler stated, these peers are "meaningful friends." Unfortunately, for many parents, this often is not the child next door or even a child in the neighborhood. Parents, therefore, must actively seek out appropriate playmates for their child. Once such a group has been identified, parents must support the development of the friendships even if it means traveling some distance for a play date. The rewards of such efforts will be realized as the parents watch these friendships blossom and evolve into long term relationships.

Magical STUFF

While peers are key in the development of meaningful play episodes, so too are the materials that are available to a child. Young gifted children often prefer materials that are open-ended and that can be used in a variety of ways. For example, rather than providing a specific costume for a child, offer pieces of material in varying textures and scarves along with safety pins and tape. Armed with these supplies, the child will create an array of costumes depending on his or her own agenda. Elyse, for example, creates veils and capes from vividly colored scarves when she plays the role of Psyche.

A child who is intrigued with creating three-dimensional representations will benefit from a large set of wooden blocks that can be used to create any number of structures. Such materials are limited only by the child's imagination. A young gifted child, then, assigns meaning to open-ended materials in response to his or her own ideas. Conversely, he or she will become bored quickly with materials that do not offer this flexibility. It is, therefore, imperative that parents offer such children interesting, multi-purpose, and multifaceted play materials that respond to this creative development.

The play of children is an essential component of their development. For young gifted children, it is a forum for the development of their creativity, their social competence, their imagination, and their friendships. What other activity promises so much?

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2. Has difficulty remaining seated when required to do so

3. Is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli

4. Has difficulty awaiting turn in games or group situations

5. Often blurts out answers to questions before they have been completed

6. Has difficulty following through on instructions from others (not due to oppositional behavior or failure of comprehension), e.g., fails to finish chores

7. Has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities

8. Often shifts from one uncompleted activity to another

9. Has difficulty playing quietly

10. Often talks excessively

11. Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into other children's games)

12. Often does not seem to listen to what is being said

13. Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities at school or at home (e.g., toys, pencils, books, assignments)

14. Often engages in physically dangerous activities without considering possible consequences (not for the purpose of thrill-seeking), e.g., runs into street without looking

[Note: The above items are listed in descending order of discriminating power. . .] (DSM III-R, p. 56)

Many of the behaviors listed above can be seen in gifted children who have been placed in unsuitable and unresponsive school environments. Because their nervous systems seem to require much activity, young gifted children are frequently described as "hyperactive and highly distractible" (Whitmore, 1980, p. 147). Gifted boys, in particular, may be very active physically and find it difficult to remain quiet or still during tasks which are repetitive or unimaginative. Some children are immovable when working on projects about which they are passionate, have difficulty "suffering fools gladly" (Hollingworth, 1939) and are able to perform multiple activities and listen to multiple sources simultaneously. Although ADHD cannot be discounted, especially if the first eight characteristics appear with great intensity, there are numerous additional hypotheses which can explain some of these behaviors in gifted children and adults.

Children with divergent, creative or random learning styles, for example, often find regular classroom environments uninviting or difficult to attend to. These children may become fidgety, inattentive and even disruptive because their learning needs are not being met. Unsuitable classroom environment or curricula contribute significantly to the inappropriate behaviors often attributed to attention deficits. Many gifted children work in environments where the pace is too slow, the level of instruction is months or years behind them, creativity or looking at ideas from different points of view are discouraged, and spontaneity is not acceptable. Sometimes their responses are as socially inappropriate as the classroom is educationally inappropriate.

Many behaviors that might be perceived as signs of attention deficits may also result from overexcitabilities as described by Kazimierz Dabrowski and Michael Piechowski (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977).

Overexcitabilities

Overexcitabilities (OEs) are inborn intensities indicating heightened ability to respond to stimuli. Found to a greater degree in the gifted, overexcitabilities are expressed as increased sensitivity, awareness and intensity, and represent a real difference in the fabric of life and quality of experience. Dabrowski identified five areas of intensity: Psychomotor, Sensual, Intellectual, Imaginational and Emotional.

Psychomotor Overexcitability

Psychomotor OE is a heightened excitability of the neuromuscular system. This psychomotor intensity includes a "capacity for being active and energetic" (Piechowski, 1991, p. 287), love of movement for its own sake, surplus of energy demonstrated by rapid speech, zealous enthusiasm, intense physical activity and a need for action (Piechowski, 1979, 1991). When feeling tense, individuals strong in Psychomotor OE may talk compulsively, act impulsively, misbehave and act out, display nervous habits, show intense drive (tending toward "workaholism"), compulsively organize or become quite competitive. They derive great joy from boundless physical and verbal activity but others may find them overwhelming. At home and at school, children with excessive psychomotor energy are never still. They thrive on activity and encourage others to "just do something." They may talk constantly. Adults and peers want to tell them to sit down and be quiet! Psychomotor OE is the most difficult of the overexcitabilities to differentiate from ADHD. However, a diagnostician familiar with both giftedness and various forms of ADD can distinguish between these two patterns.

Sensual Overexcitability

Sensual OE is expressed as heightened

experience of sensual pleasure or displeasure, including seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, and hearing (Piechowski, 1979, 1991). Those with Sensual OE have a far more expansive experience from their sensual input. They have an increased and early appreciation of aesthetics (music, language, art, etc.) and derive endless delight from tastes, smells, textures, sounds and sights. But because of this increased sensitivity, they may also feel overstimulated or uncomfortable with sensory input. Gifted children sometimes have difficulty sorting out all they hear, feel, smell, etc. Their sensitivity makes them easily distractible. When tense, some individuals high in Sensual OE may overeat, go on buying sprees, seek the limelight (Piechowski, 1979, 1991) or seek stimulation in other ways. Others may withdraw from stimulation. Sensually overexcitable children may find clothing tags, classroom noise or smells from the cafeteria so distracting that schoolwork becomes secondary. These children may also become so absorbed in their love of particular pieces of art or music that the outside world ceases to exist.

Sensually overexcitable children may find clothing tags, classroom noise or smells from the cafeteria so distracting that schoolwork becomes secondary.

Intellectual Overexcitability

Intellectual OE is demonstrated by a marked need to seek understanding and truth, to gain knowledge, and to analyze and synthesize. Those high in Intellectual OE have incredibly active minds. They are intensely curious, avid readers and keen observers; they are able to concentrate, engage in prolonged intellectual effort, and be tenacious in problem solving when they choose. They relish theories, thinking about thinking and moral thinking (Piechowski, 1979, 1991). They are also quite independent in thought and sometimes appear critical of and impatient with others who cannot sustain their intellectual pace. This intellectual intensity seems to cause the greatest difficulty at school when these children become so excited about learning and thinking that they interrupt or blurt out answers at inappropriate times. Their tendency to be "too honest" and to criticize others' ideas can cause problems with peers, family members and teachers.

Imaginational Overexcitability

Imaginational OE reflects a heightened play of the imagination with rich associations of images and impressions, frequent use of image and metaphor, facility for invention and fantasy, detailed visualization and elaborate dreams (Piechowski, 1979, 1991). Often children high in Imaginational OE mix truth with fiction, create their own private worlds with imaginary companions and dramatize to escape boredom. They find it difficult to stay tuned into a classroom where creativity and imagination are secondary to learning rigid academic curriculum. They may write stories or draw instead of doing seatwork or participating in class discussions, or they may have difficulty completing tasks when some incredible idea sends them off on an imaginative tangent.

Emotional Overexcitability

Emotional OE is often the first overexcitability to be noticed by parents. It is reflected in heightened, intense feelings, extremes of complex emotions, identification with others' feelings, and strong affective expression (Piechowski, 1991). Sometimes the negative manifestations include physical responses like stomach aches and blushing, depression or concern with death (Piechowski, 1979). Emotionally overexcitable people have a remarkable capacity for deep relationships; they show strong emotional attachments to people, places and things. They have compassion, empathy and sensitivity in relationships. This sensitivity may make it difficult to adjust to new environments or lead to conflict about the depth or lack of depth in a relationship. Those with strong Emotional OE are acutely aware of their own feelings, of how they are growing and changing. They often carry on inner dialogues and engage in self-judgment (Piechowski, 1979, 1991). Children high in Emotional OE are often accused of "overreacting." They tend to be concerned about "adult" issues such as the homeless, AIDS or war. Their compassion and concern for others, as well as the intensity of their feelings, may interfere with concentration on school tasks which are unrelated to real world issues.

Mislabeling Overexcitabilities

Psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational and emotional overexcitabilities, often found in gifted children, offer an alternative explanation for many of the symptoms of ADHD. These intensities, coupled with classroom environments and curricula which do not meet the needs of gifted, creative or divergent learners, may lead to the mislabeling of gifted children as ADHD. To avoid mislabeling gifted children, parents and educators are encouraged to ask themselves the following questions:

- *Could the behaviors be in response to inappropriate placement, insufficient challenge or lack of intellectual peers? Does the child show these behaviors at home?*
- *Could lack of interest, boredom or irrelevancy play a part? Is the child unable to concentrate even when interested in the activity?*

- *Have any curricular modifications been made in an attempt to change the inappropriate behaviors? If so, what has been the result?*
- *Has the child been interviewed? What are his or her feelings about the behaviors?*
- *Does the child feel out of control? Do parents perceive the child to be out of control? (Many children with ADHD do not recognize when they are out of control.)*
- *Has the child been taught strategies to limit stimuli and deal with stress? Has the child been taught appropriate social skills?*
- *Can the child explain in a reasonable fashion why tasks and activities remain unfinished?*
- *What prompts the interruptions and excessive talking? Can the child control these behaviors?*
- *Can the "inattentive" child repeat the instructions?*
- *Does the child thrive on working on multiple tasks? Does he or she finish them?*
- *Do the behaviors occur at certain times of the day, during certain subjects, with certain teachers, in certain environments, and not in other circumstances?*
- *Is the child getting an appropriate amount of teacher attention? Does the child demand constant attention from the teacher? Is he or she capable of working alone?*

If, after addressing these questions, parents and teachers feel that an unsuitable, inflexible or unreceptive educational environment may be causing the child to "misbehave" or tune out, then attempts should be made to modify the current environment or another placement should be sought. On the other hand, if there is ***any*** suspicion that part of the problem resides within the child, then it is most certainly appropriate to refer the child to a competent diagnostician who has had experience with both giftedness and attention deficit disorders. It is ***never*** appropriate for teachers, parents or pediatricians to label a child as ADD or ADHD without a comprehensive clinical evaluation that can distinguish ADHD from look-alikes with other causes.

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dissonance for them and placing them at risk for having problems in school.

Some sources of stress for gifted kids in school are:

- ***advanced cognitive functioning***
- ***older peer contacts***
- ***earlier onset of developmental stages***
- ***rapid progress through developmental stages***
- ***awareness of being different***

Factors that are part and parcel of being gifted can lead to separation from their classmates, to widening the gulf between them and other students who are assumed to be their peers.

Much of what has been written about social-emotional issues for gifted students reflects concern about the conflicts that result from their being different or out of sync with others in school. As Manaster and Powell (1983) pointed out, people want to belong and want to know where they stand or how they fit. However, gifted youngsters are

> *in particular psychosocial jeopardy because (1) they are different and do not fit; (2) they appear different to themselves and to others and can or should not fit; or because (3) they feel they are different, feel they do not fit, and accept these conclusions (p. 71).*

Because of the ways the typical school environment is structured, gifted students are confronted with these issues on a day-to-day basis.

Differences Within the Gifted Population

The more we know about gifted youngsters, the more we realize that they are not all alike. In fact, the only generalization that can safely be made about gifted and talented individuals is that there are more ways in which they differ than ways in which they resemble each other (Sanborn, 1979). As Impelizzeri, Farrell, and Melville (1976) observed, "Among the greatest difficulties in helping gifted children to become what they are capable of becoming is the recognition of their individual differences" (p. 44). Some gifted students are even more at risk in school than others because of individual differences that set them apart from the others. Furthermore, variability within the gifted population often is forgotten when educational decisions are being made about specific students. To carry the "peg" analogy a bit further, gifted kids are not all "squares" either; some are diamonds, some are stars, and some might even be described most accurately as free-form or asymmetrical. However, schools often try to shape gifted students, educationally, as if they were all alike.

To carry the "peg" analogy a bit further, gifted kids are not all "squares" either; some are diamonds, some are stars, and some might even be described most accurately as free-form or asymmetrical. However, schools often try to shape gifted students, educationally, as if they were all alike.

One way to think about the ways that gifted individuals differ from each other is by looking at four general categories: *degree of giftedness; racial, cultural, and socio-economic differences; type of giftedness;* and *other confounding variables.* Any of these, singly or in combination with the others, can affect the probability of a particular gifted student having difficulties in school, even in an otherwise well-designed gifted program. The potential impact of individual differences within each of these categories is as follows:

a) ***degree of giftedness:*** The more highly gifted students are, the more out of sync they are in their own development and in relation to age peers. [See Martha Morelock's article in *UOG, 4*(3), pp.1, 11-15.]

b) ***racial, cultural and socio-economic differences:*** The more that gifted students differ either from the dominant racial, ethnic, or socio-economic group or from the expectations of their own group, the more likely it is that they will be at risk in the typical school environment.

c) ***type of giftedness:*** Students who are creative, divergent thinkers, those who are gifted in the psychosocial domain, and those who are gifted in visual and performing arts are likely to have more difficulty fitting into a typical school environment that focuses on convergent thinking and academic achievement.

d) ***other confounding variables:*** Gifted students who have been identified as having learning disabilities or behavior disorders, those who are considered to be emotionally disturbed, and those who are physically challenged, hearing impaired, or visually impaired are likely to be overlooked in the typical school environment because their other identified exceptional educational needs tend to be addressed, rather than their giftedness.

Broadening the definition of giftedness to encompass multiple talents and diversity among the gifted may have come out of a desire to create educational environments more suitable to the development of creative potential. However, efforts to modify the learning environment have not kept pace with an understanding of

giftedness that includes the entire range of individual differences within the gifted population.

Looking at the Learning Environment

School can be a primary source of dissonance for gifted students.

> *In general, the school pays little attention to the child who is out of tune with its usual expectations. The philosophy, objectives, and methodology of the school explicitly state that the orientation and focus are on the average child. The gifted child has two choices: he can revolt or he can hide his giftedness.* (Ziv, 1977, p. 52)

The learning environment has a significant impact on school performance and the social-emotional adjustment of all students, including the gifted, and is one of the elements in a student's life over which educators do have some control, if they are willing to exercise it. Effective tools for assessing learning environments are available, and the perceptions of gifted students can be used for making appropriate modifications to better meet these students' educational needs (Fiedler-Brand, 1990).

The process of assessing the level of dissonance that a gifted youngster is experiencing in school is a relatively simple one. Find out what gifted students think about their present learning environment; then, ask how they think it *should* be. Look at the results for individual students, and find those who see significant discrepancies between the "ideal" learning environment and what they think it is like right now. These students are the "square pegs in round holes"—the ones who do not fit in well in their current educational setting.

One way of looking at components of the learning environment so that it can be more responsive to the specific learning needs of gifted students is to consider each of the 15 dimensions assessed by Fraser, Anderson, and Walberg (1982). These dimensions are: *cohesiveness, diversity, formality, speed, material environment, friction, goal direction, favoritism, difficulty, apathy, democracy, cliqueness, satisfaction, disorganization,* and *competitiveness.* Figure 1 gives a brief definition of each of these dimensions.

By using a simple paper-and-pencil instrument, educators can find out how much dissonance gifted students are experiencing in relationship to each of these dimensions (See Fiedler-Brand, 1990). Then, they can do a better job of responding to

DIMENSIONS OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Figure 1

Based on: Fraser, B. J., Anderson, G. J., and Walberg, H. J. (1982)

- **Cohesiveness:** *closeness within the group*
- **Diversity:** *variations in students' interests*
- **Formality:** *learning environment governed by formal rules*
- **Speed:** *pace of instruction*
- **Material Environment:** *resources and physical environment*
- **Friction:** *tension level*
- **Goal Direction:** *clarity of learning goals*
- **Favoritism:** *preferential treatment by teachers*
- **Difficulty:** *how hard the work is*
- **Apathy:** *lack of interest/ uninvolved*
- **Democracy:** *equality/shared decision-making*
- **Cliqueness:** *how much students segregate themselves*
- **Satisfaction:** *enjoyment of school*
- **Disorganization:** *confusion within classes*
- **Competitiveness:** *how much students compete against each other*

individual needs. For instance, counseling interventions might focus on helping a student find appropriate ways of coping and learning how to function more effectively within the framework of the educational setting, including developing strategies for negotiation and self-advocacy.

Conclusion

The importance of an appropriate learning environment for gifted students cannot be underestimated. Current efforts at school improvement, including the educational reform movement, have not adequately addressed the ways that the school environment can best be designed for serving the diverse needs of the gifted population. Increased attention needs to be paid to providing educational environments which will have beneficial effects on gifted students' growth and development. Even high achievers who "play the game" suffer negative effects of the discrepancies between their unique characteristics and the typical attributes of the learning environment in American schools (Whitmore, 1988).

Find out what gifted students think about their present learning environment; then, ask how they think it should be.

A more direct way of using the information about the 15 dimensions of the learning environment is to think about how modifications can be made to each of them that will increase the probability of gifted students' finding a better match between their characteristics and the learning experiences they have in school. By modifying curriculum and instruction in relationship to each of these dimensions, a climate for learning can be created that will be more appropriate for helping gifted students learn all they are capable of learning. Figure 2 on page 14 offers some ideas of ways this might be done. Expand the chart with your own ideas.

A final approach to resolving difficulties that a particular gifted student is experiencing as a result of serious dissonance with the educational environment is for that student to change schools. Usually, this is a "last ditch effort." However, another school may be a better match for that student's characteristics and needs, or another school may be more prepared to respond to individual differences, including those that set an individual gifted student apart from others. By using the 15 dimensions of the learning environment as part of the process of considering another school, it may be possible to find a better "fit" for that student.

No matter how apparent or hidden the discrepancies are, identifying students who are experiencing dissonance in school can lead to educational responses that will allow them to maximize their potential. Furthermore, information about the learning environment can be used to make changes in curriculum and instruction based on the characteristics and needs that place gifted students out of sync with the learning environment typically found in school.

> *Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the learning environment is the development of an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect among individuals and a commitment to self-improvement. Although it may be impossible to teach a child directly to love learning for its own sake, some environments can clearly either stifle or enhance the student's natural interest.* (Fox, 1979, p.109)

Educators have a responsibility to do whatever they can to create a school setting where all gifted students can feel that they belong, where their unique traits and talents are recognized, stimulated, and celebrated, and where their natural passions for learning will continue to blossom and flourish.

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SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES Continued from page 13

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO MODIFY THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

Figure 2

- **Cohesiveness** *(closeness within the group)*
  - Grouping students for significant time periods by ability and interests.
  - Time devoted to building group rapport, mutual respect and appreciation for others.
- **Diversity** *(variations in students' interests)*
  - Validation for and celebration of individual differences, including giftedness.
  - Encouragement for specialization in areas of strength and interest.
- **Formality** *(learning environment governed by formal rules)*
  - Student-determined rules.
  - Analysis of classroom as a microcosm of society.
- **Speed** *(pace of instruction)*
  - Instruction in keeping with gifted students' ability to assimilate knowledge quickly.
  - Student-determined pace of instruction.
- **Material Environment** *(resources and physical environment)*
  - Access to a large quantity of resources, a wide variety of resources, and resources at widely-varying levels beyond grade-level materials.
  - Flexibility and mobility; freedom of movement within and beyond the classroom.
- **Friction** *(tension level)*
  - Use of any conflict as an opportunity to learn about conflict resolution.
  - Utilize effective strategies for reducing tension in the classroom.
- **Goal Direction** *(clarity of learning goals)*
  - "Non-negotiable" goals are clearly communicated.
  - Students can negotiate how they will demonstrate mastery of non-negotiable goals.
  - Students collaborate with teacher in setting other, individually-determined goals.
- **Favoritism** *(preferential treatment by teachers)*
  - Comparisons are avoided "like the plague."
  - Emphasis on self-evaluation; use of encouragement, rather than praise.
- **Difficulty** *(how hard the work is)*
  - Instruction/content is appropriately challenging and complex.
  - Student-determined level of difficulty, with assessment appropriately matched to student's willingness to risk learning new material.
- **Apathy** *(lack of interest/uninvolved)*
  - Student-centered curriculum and classroom management.
  - Involvement in social issues; commitment of class time for students to be engaged in social action at ANY level (school, community, state, national, and/or international).
- **Democracy** *(equality/shared decision-making)*
  - Student-determined rules and consequences.
  - Analysis of the democratic process and systematic application of democratic principles in the school setting.
- **Cliqueness** *(how much students segregate themselves)*
  - Opportunities for gifted students to work in various groups, including both homogeneous and randomly assigned.
  - Analysis of social issues related to cliques, including research on related issues, such as involvement in gangs.
- **Satisfaction** *(enjoyment of school)*
  - Student-determined criteria for satisfying school experiences.
  - Empowerment to enable students to affect factors that increase their satisfaction.
- **Disorganization** *(confusion within classes)*
  - Provide information about various approaches to organization and allow students to apply them to improving the school environment.
  - Multi-faceted use of mentorships, including opportunities for students to analyze their mentors' systems for organizing their work.
- **Competitiveness** *(how much students compete against each other)*
  - Provide appropriate opportunities for students to compete with others of like ability.
  - Have students study the competition-cooperation-collaboration continuum; use for analyzing various situations in order to decide what approach to take at which times (as well as to determine when individual effort would be the best alternative).

Thoughts on Giftedness

Lee Johnson

A Parent's Perspective

When it became clear to me that my kindergarten child was what they call "gifted," I had a complex reaction that has taken me some time to understand. I had known since he was very small that he was unusually bright. Before he could sit up by himself he lay for an hour at a time concentrating on the intricacies of his crib toys; he learned to talk early, in complete sentences, and the adults around him found it hard to believe they were actually hearing such sophisticated comments from such a young child. However, I was aware of the strength of the parental tendency to think one's child is the most amazing being on the planet. Children need a parent to be in love with them like that, and I certainly fulfilled the need. When Shoney was about two, I thought I heard him make a comment from the back seat of the car; then in an instant I realized it was not my child speaking, but another child sitting next to him. My rose-colored glasses came off in a flash, and the comment that a moment before had seemed the height of childish brilliance lost its glitter and became ordinary. This experience, and others like it, led me to be very cautious in my assessment of my child's "giftedness." But the day came when a bit of his spontaneous writing involving apostrophes and parentheses seemed to me shockingly sophisticated, and I determined to obtain a professional opinion.

The assessment more than validated my intuition about the quality of my child's functioning, and I found myself deeply troubled. I wondered about this reaction. Was it some kind of false modesty? Or the responsibility of providing adequate intellectual stimulation that troubles me so? Or the shadows of my own childhood, particularly my dismal school experience, casting their gloomy projections? Or the possibility of exploitation that I feared could grasp me if in an unconscious moment I became involved in bolstering my self-esteem through my child's achievement?

I can't claim to be totally free of any of these influences. But I also have an awareness of something else—that every gift contains a danger. Whatever gift we have we are compelled to express. And if the expression of that gift is blocked, distorted, or merely allowed to languish, then the gift turns against us, and we suffer.

In my childhood I felt my intelligence, sensitivity, and insight to be a burden. When I commented on interpersonal dynamics I was considered rude (or "fresh," as my father called it); when I had a million creative ideas I overwhelmed the other kids and was considered "bossy"; when I responded with heightened sensitivity to environmental and interpersonal stresses, I was labeled too demanding; when I found the schoolwork simplistic and uninteresting, I was considered arrogant. So I became rude, bossy, demanding, arrogant. Deeply puzzled, I retreated in pain and confusion from the boredom of the overheated, tightly controlled classroom, and from the frightening feelings of not belonging. When I was depressed as a teenager, my aunt lashed out, in a moment of frustration, "You're so smart, why can't you figure out what's wrong with you?" My self-accusation, exactly. Being gifted became a curse, something I hated in myself, because it seemed to separate me from others and was no use to me.

My intelligence had been nurtured only in competitiveness. I kept losing the competitive edge. When I discovered in grammar school that I was no longer the fastest on the timed arithmetic tests; when in high school I did not win the creative writing contest because someone else was clearly more at home with plot and language; when in college I discovered that psychology would be all about learning curves of rats, and not the kinds of psychological depths that drew me; then at each point I fell further into despair. I couldn't settle down and be a secretary in an insurance company, as my father wished, and I couldn't seem to do anything else either; I had to find a way to express my gifts or they would turn against me.

I observed a situation in a first grade classroom recently that showed me, in exquisite detail, how this dynamic works. The children were working in cooperative groups of four on math problems. In the group I observed, one child was clearly mathematically gifted. He figured the answers in a flash, and shared them with his team-mates. Unfortunately, this meant that the other children in his group did not get a chance to use their problem-solving skills. The teacher instructed the bright child to keep the answers to himself and "just give the others hints." With no adult support, he didn't understand how to just give hints (that's not an easy task even for many adults) and so he alternated between fidgeting and being bored, on the one hand, and blurting out the answers, disobeying the teacher, on the other. There is tremendous energy behind our in-born gifts; we need to express them, as this child needed to test the strength of his mind against the math problems. I could see him frustrated, like a pony that wants to run free, or a painter who wants to delve into her art. It is commonplace nowadays for the schools, public and private, to assure parents that they individualize the curriculum and challenge the individual child at the child's level, but I am discouraged to note now infrequently that seems to really happen. It is not a luxury for childen to have room to express their gifts; it is a psychological necessity. I am not talking about academic enrichment, but psychic survival in the academic setting.

Now I have a better understanding about my ambivalence regarding this giftedness business. Consequently, I have determined to do my job as a parent—to somehow provide the kind of learning environment for Shoney that will allow him to flourish.

Lee Johnson is a licensed marriage and family counselor in Berkeley, California, and the mother of a gifted child.

Kathi Kearney

THE HIGHLY GIFTED

The Age-Grade Lockstep

Paul, even as a preschooler, had amassed an unusual amount of information about the flora and fauna in his isolated rural environment, which he delighted in sharing. He drew detailed pictures of birds and animals, and voraciously read anything he could find about natural history. But when he returned from his first day at kindergarten, he flung his papers onto the table, "It's baby work there and I'm not going back!" he declared.

Cindy, whose reading taste at age four included the works of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Madeleine L'Engle, sat on the rug during Circle Time at her preschool with her mother, who was volunteering in the classroom that day. The teacher began reading a familiar, beautifully illustrated alphabet book to the children, naming the letters as she read. Cindy leaned over to her mother, realizing the full import of this familiar activity for the first time. She whispered to her mother incredulously, "She's trying to teach them their letters, isn't she, Mom? They don't know their letters yet!"

Both Paul and Cindy were out of sync in school, although their school years had barely begun. Despite a few pioneering attempts across the country to establish multi-age classrooms that foster continuous progress, most highly gifted children are caught in what Stanley (1978) calls the "age-grade lockstep." Children proceed through school one grade per year, and their birthday—not their individual development, personal readiness, or academic progress—determines their grade placement.

The problem of the age grade lockstep has been combined recently with a problem which should have been part of the solution for extremely gifted children. Genuinely alarmed by the fact that the formal curriculum of the higher grades was increasingly being "shoved down" to the kindergarten and first grades, despite its inappropriateness for the developmental tasks of most 5 and 6 year olds, in recent years early childhood educators fought back. They reclaimed the role of play, discovery, integrated curriculum units, and the use of manipulative materials in primary grade classrooms. This movement came to be known as "developmentally appropriate curricula" or "developmentally appropriate practices," and in some communities has transformed rigid classrooms into bustling centers of meaningful activity.

But what of the children like Paul and Cindy, whose intellectual development is extraordinarily advanced? Because teacher training programs rarely address the needs of extremely gifted children, at best Paul and Cindy are likely to be accepted for who they are but viewed as anomalies, unusual children likely to come along only once in a lifetime. At worst, their advanced intellectual development and the notion of "developmentally appropriate curriculum" may collide in the classroom, the teacher insisting that the child "can't" be doing what she sees the child doing with her own eyes, because it isn't "developmentally appropriate"! Concerned about "hurried children" (Elkind, 1981) and the loss of childhood in contemporary society, some teachers perceive the advanced development of an extremely gifted child with alarm, as an indication that the child has been unduly "pushed." But as one mother of a highly gifted child put it, "I am not a pushy parent, but I have a pushy kid!"

It is time to expand our understanding of developmentally appropriate practices to include those for children whose development is advanced and outside the norm. Most highly gifted children do end up accelerating academically in some way at some point in their schooling. Elkind (1988) insists that this is not opposed to the philosophy of developmentally appropriate education, and perhaps should not even be called "acceleration."

> *When an intellectually gifted child is promoted one or several grades, what has been accelerated? Surely not the child's level of intellectual development—that, after all, is the reason for his or her promotion! What has been accelerated is the child's progress through the school curriculum. But this can be looked at a different way, not so much as acceleration as tailoring. What promotion does for intellectually gifted children is to make a better fit between the child's level of intellectual development and the curriculum.*
>
> *...Promotion of intellectually gifted children is simply another way of attempting to match the curriculum to the child's abilities, not to accelerate those abilities...Indeed the positive effects of promoting intellectually gifted children provide additional evidence for the benefits of developmentally appropriate curricula.* (Elkind, 1988, p.2)

A greater understanding of general child development gradually led to recent changes in early childhood education. As we continue to research and explore extreme giftedness as a developmental phenomenon, additional "developmentally appropriate practices" in education, parenting, and counseling for exceptionally gifted children will also emerge.

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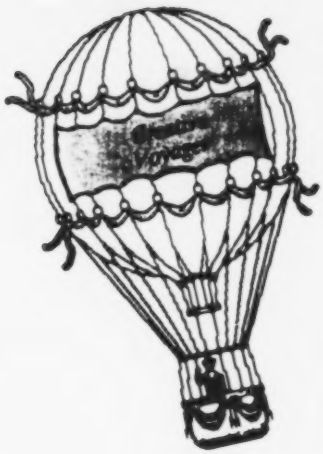
Kathi Kearney is founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children in South Casco, Maine, a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Editor of ***Highly Gifted Children.***

IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY



Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Creative Dramatics, Part II

On our last journey we visited classrooms and homes which utilize creative dramatics to foster growth in creativity and problem solving. Because it is such a rich environment, we will continue to explore it in this and the next column.

The first activity teachers can use is the ***Environmental Walk***. It is yet another creative dramatics classic. The leader reads a passage from a story, novel, fairy tale, or biography that is rich in sensory detail. Students move about the room reacting as if they are physically experiencing the environment(s) described. The passage is read slowly enough to allow students reaction time to pantomime the feelings, behaviors, and actions narrated or described. The environmental walk is a terrific pre-reading activity. Once students have walked through a dark forest filled with monsters and fierce, wild animals that make terrifying sounds, they become both intellectually and physically involved with the story or tale at hand. At a natural stopping point, ask students to quietly return to their seats and finish reading the story silently or quietly in small groups. Alternately, a short discussion may be held following an environmental walk in which students are asked to predict what will happen in the story before silent reading commences. The environmental walk is an activity rich in possibilities. Once students are familiar with the activity, they can create their own scripts for subsequent environmental walks their classmates might make. This becomes a particularly popular writing activity at Halloween. Students love writing descriptions of scary walks through haunted houses at midnight. The writing of sensory-rich exposition and narration assists in the development of composition skills. The completed student-written environmental scripts may be read by students for the activity or placed on audio tapes with appropriate music for accompaniment.

It is an easy step from environmental walks to ***Pantomine***. Begin teaching pantomime with a few simple exercises. Invite youth to practice opening and closing doors and windows, entering and exiting closets, rooms, cars, and buildings, and performing short and simple tasks such as putting on shoes and tying shoe laces or checking the baking progress of a cake in an imaginary oven. Without being overly exaggerated, all movement should be heightened and deliberate. It should be completely open to viewers (no backs to the audience), and performed slowly enough that viewers can readily follow the sequence of the action. Building on the early successes students enjoy and their understanding of how the elements of pantomime are practiced, teachers and parents can assign increasingly elaborate and sophisticated pantomimes that involve longer durations of time. Place youth in pairs and ask each pair to pantomime a stock situation: small children pilfering cookies from a cookie jar; a shoe salesperson trying to sell a customer unwanted shoes; a restaurant waiter confronted with a finicky eater; and a midnight raider who is caught in the act of taking food from the refrigerator.

(Look for Improvisations in our next issue)

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of several books, including *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors.*

Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

Lawrence Kutner (1992), a regular contributor to the New York Times, wrote recently about dealing with "so-called crybabies—children who respond with tears to the slightest provocation or challenge" (p. C12). Noting that so-called crybabies "are viewed with disdain by other children and embarrassment by their parents," Kutner proceeds to point out that "there is another side to this temperament." He quotes child psychiatrist Dr. Stanley Turecki, who says, "These sensitive children whose feelings are easily hurt are also very sensitive to the feelings of other children...which is a potential advantage. Children who are easily moved to tears also tend to laugh easily" (p. C12).

Kutner does not draw a connection between this kind of emotional sensitivity and giftedness, but there is much in his article that parents of gifted children can respond to. It prompted Frances Cleveland to reflect on the childhood experiences of her daughter, Bonnie. Cleveland describes Bonnie, now a graduate student, as an intense, serious, yet vivacious child. Echoing Turecki's words, Cleveland says of her daughter, "She was easily moved to tears, easily moved to laughter, and easily moved to moral outrage."

"Bonnie seemed acutely attuned to the attitudes of others, almost to a fault. While others might not react to playground or classroom taunts, she seemed constitutionally unable to shrug them off." What made her situation more difficult was that she was also very talented, academically and musically. This meant that she was often out of step with her age peers, who were put off by her intelligence and did not share her interests. Those differences, coupled with her tendency to respond to provocation with intensity, whether tears or anger, made her an even more attractive target.

Lawrence Kutner writes of crybabies, "Even the word suggests disappointment that they are not as mature as their friends and families would hope" (p. C12). Fortunately for Bonnie, her parents understood that her abilities and her sensitivity were part of the same package and were able to help her understand it as well. The Clevelands had the wisdom to recognize that what might have appeared to be emotional immaturity might also indicate a depth of feeling. Rather than trying to suppress her intensity, they wanted her to acknowledge it and recognize its positive and negative aspects. Paradoxically, by becoming more aware of this part of herself and accepting both her emotional sensitivity and her intellectual giftedness, Bonnie found that her relationships with her peers improved.

Bonnie's parents were able to view her intensity as a trait to be understood, accepted, and even valued— even though it might sometimes be painful. With their support, what might have been seen as problematic hypersensitivity has become a source of emotional strength for her. She has also come to appreciate that her empathy for others springs from the same source. Through her parents' own sensitivity and respect for her, Bonnie was able to gain critical insights into herself and into others.

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Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

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ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

Add this horror story to your file on "rationale for gifted education." Kris is a tenth grade student with a consistent 4.0 grade point average, in an overcrowded suburban high school. Although academics come easily to her, her social life does not, and lately she has been exhibiting alarming signs of depression. When her concerned mother contacted the school counselor for an appointment and suggestions on how to enhance Kris's self-esteem, she was shocked to be greeted with laughter. The harried counselor's less than humorous response was: "I am responsible for 500 students. Do you think I ever have time to know—or even think about—a student with more than a 3.5 average?"

Unfortunately, appropriate counseling for bright students is seldom available at the elementary level, and even more unfortunately, as in the case of Kris, it is not easily accessible at the secondary level. Even in those rare junior high, middle or high schools where counselors have more time, support may be too little and too late.

Gifted students, of all ages, need someone to talk to, someone to listen and understand, someone who is not judgmental. Although parents can provide such support (I hope they do!), gifted children also need an ongoing relationship with someone who is objective—a peer, an older child, an adult in the school or community.

Carlton (1992) describes the painful first-grade experience of her highly gifted son: "The saddest loss...was that Joe felt 'invisible' in the classroom. He did not feel worthwhile as a classmate or appreciated as a friend...Joe needs a soul mate" (p. 6).

Doug, a gifted individual whose creative talents enabled him to survive years of unchallenging school experience, did not find a "soul mate" until he was 12. Unable to answer Doug's tearful query, "Why aren't I dumb like other kids?", his parents approached the counseling office where they met Mr. R., a junior high counselor who sincerely cared about kids. He took the time to befriend Doug, to listen to his frustrations and praise his successes.

Doug is now grown and involved in his own career, and Mr. R. has left education and moved to a different city, but they are still friends and stay in touch. Happily, this relationship has had a positive impact on Doug's life, but sadly, it didn't occur until seventh grade.

A counseling staff in every elementary school is high on my education wish list. However, given the practical realities of school funding today, the best we can hope for is to increase awareness of the unique and often painful social/emotional situation of "out-of-sync" gifted children. I applaud the elementary teacher who realized that "these little guys need to get together once in awhile and talk about what bugs them." And I empathize with the third grader who evaluated the teacher's weekly support group with these words: "It was great! They were all nerds like me!"

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Dorothy Knopper is a private consultant for gifted education in Colorado and the publisher of *Understanding Our Gifted*.

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Department of "Oops." The March/April, 1993, issue of *Understanding Our Gifted* was mistakenly labeled Volume 5, Issue 5, instead of Volume 5, Issue 4. Therefore, we have labeled this issue (May/June 1993) Volume 5, Issue 5A. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused you.

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"A Gifted Globe": Tenth World Congress
August 8-13. The World Council for Gifted and Talented Children will hold its 10th Conference at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Ontario. For more information, please contact Dr. Norah Maier, University of Toronto, School of Continuing Studies, 158 St. George St., Toronto, Ont. Canada M5S, 2V8 (416) 978-5527.

Seventh International Conference on the Autonomous Learner Model
June 22-27, 1993. The theme of this conference is "Gifted Education and School Reform." Location: YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. For more information, contact ALPS, P.O. Box 2264, Greeley, CO 80632, 1-800-345-2577.

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Philosophy of Giftedness

Re-examining the Foundations of Gifted Education
Richard W. Ronvik, M.S.

Giftedness and "The New Philosophy of Science"
James Borland, Ph.D.

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July—August, 1993

Volume 5, Issue 6

Re-examining the Foundations of Giftedness

Richard W. Ronvik, M.S.

Long-term observers of the development of education for the gifted have been aware that the pendulum of popular support has swung not infrequently from one extreme to the other. Currently it is on its negative swing, being driven by the regular education initiative, some aspects of school reform, dishonest or incomplete presentations of grouping research, irresponsible claims for cooperative learning, legitimate concerns about equity, fears of elitism, budget constraints, and most embarrassing of all, poorly constructed gifted programs.

This current swing of the pendulum is quite forceful and it would be ironic if it were weaknesses within gifted programs themselves, rather than outside forces, that brought the entire framework crashing down. To say that an enormous number of gifted programs in the country today are based upon weak philosophical underpinnings would be to grant them a courteous understatement.

Inclusion vs. Exclusion

To begin with, many program developers are still struggling with the issue of whether to be more exclusive or inclusive

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FOCUS ON:

PHILOSOPHY OF GIFTEDNESS

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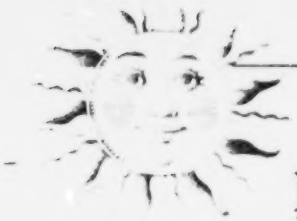
Giftedness and "The New Philosophy of Science"

James H. Borland, Ph.D.

Some time ago, I agreed to Linda Silverman's request that I produce an article for this journal on the topic of "The Philosophy of Giftedness." Ignoring the inner voice that sensibly reminded me that I am not a philosopher, I decided that I could probably address this topic in some manner that Linda would find acceptable and reassured myself that I did not have to produce anything until 1993, a time too far into the future to contemplate seriously. Time passed, however, and so did my confidence that I could do justice to this massive topic, especially within the severe space restrictions this journal imposes on its contributors, thus negating the academic's primary writing strategy of prolixity combined with verbal obfuscation.

But then I began to take comfort in the breadth and lack of definition of the assigned topic, "The Philosophy of Giftedness." Just what is meant by this title, after all? There are so many branches of philosophy that deal with questions relevant to the theory and practice of educating gifted students that it is difficult to know where to begin.

(Continued on page 11)



FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome Warriors!

This is not an issue for the fainthearted. In an era of "paradigm shifts," school reform, qualitative research, political correctness and pervasive postmodernism (whatever that means), it seems appropriate for us to examine the philosophies of giftedness. As anyone who has read the literature in the field of gifted education realizes, we are not all in agreement about the nature of this population or the best means of serving them. Questions such as "Who are the gifted?" "Where does giftedness come from?" "How do we identify gifted children?" "Is 'gifted' an elitist term that has outlived its usefulness?" "What types of programs/provisions/strategies are best for this group?" "How should gifted education interface with the school reform movement?" are among the many basic unanswered questions which divide scholars in the field.

In this special issue of *Understanding Our Gifted*, we have chosen to jump with both feet into the middle of the fray. And we've agreed to disagree. You will find arguments pro and con our embracing the school reform movement. Jim Borland challenges the entire basis of scientific research, bringing us into the modern era of postpositivist inquiry. (Read his article to find out what that means.) Rick Ronvik disputes the ideas, ideals, practices, provisions and cherished traditions undergirding the field of gifted education for the last three decades. Martha Morelock brings a totally new perspective to one of the main deadlocks in the field: talent development vs. innate giftedness.

We hope you enjoy some healthy controversy and that this issue will stimulate dialogue in college classes, reconsideration of accepted practices in schools, and discussions of family values. This is a bit of a departure from our previous issues, as many of our contributors used this opportunity to wax eloquently about their pet peeves. So we are interested in hearing your reactions. Would you like more debates of this nature? Let us know. And please don't keep this issue to yourselves: this is definitely "read aloud" material to share with your friends, family and colleagues.

We believe that differences can be dealt with better through dialogue than debate, and in that vein, we are planning a dialogue between Sharon Lind and me in Volume 6, Issue 5, on the theme "Attention Deficits." Sharon took issue with editorial changes in her article, "Are We Mislabeling Over-excitable Children," in the May/June UOG, which misconstrued her meaning. This will provide an opportunity for her to clarify her position. Stay tuned!

Linda Silverman

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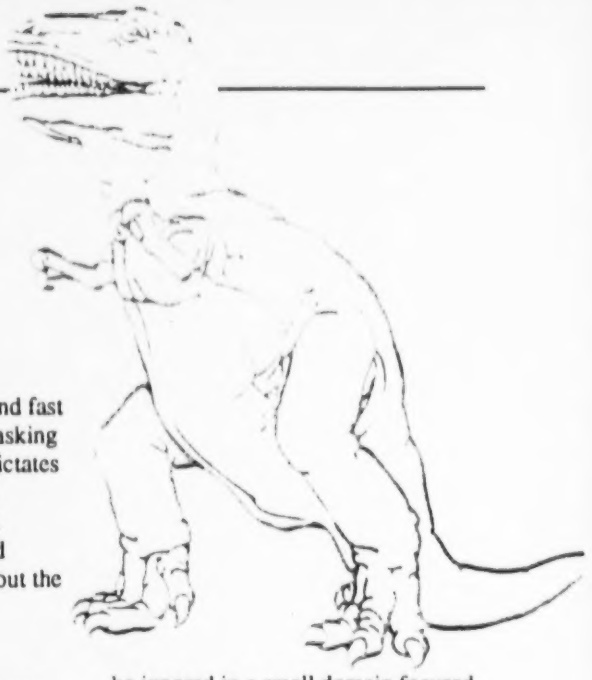
Deirdre V. Lovecky

HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNERS

The Nobel Factor



If you've been conscious during the past few months, you know about *Jurassic Park* (Crichton, 1990). Both book and movie show us science gone awry in true horror film fashion. The fictitious scientists cleverly clone dinosaurs from strands of DNA trapped in amber. While not yet a reality, such biotechnology is within the realm of future possibility. Unfortunately, the scientists working on such a project are likely to ask only whether they *can* do the cloning, not whether they *should*.

The question of whether something should be done or not is considered to be part of philosophy, not science. Centuries ago, the great scientists were also philosophers. Consider, for example, the accomplishments of Aristotle. Questions about both the nature of things and their meaning were significant. In the centuries since, science and philosophy have asked very different questions. Yet, the realms are interdependent, especially when one considers that consequences of science often have impact on all life.

Gifted children are much more likely to be exposed in their education to the methods of science than to those of philosophy despite the early interest many gifted children show in philosophical and moral issues. The focus is on doing rather than thinking about something. The models presented in much of gifted education suggest to gifted children that success depends on producing a tangible product, not on refraining from doing so. All too often the only questions presented are whether or not something is feasible and how much it will cost. In this world of quick profits, short term gains and fast turnover, there is little time for asking questions. Also as technology dictates smaller and smaller domains of accomplishment, it is likely that performing well within one field precludes thinking too much about the long term impact of one's accomplishments.

The technological product-oriented approach is antithetical to the way that many gifted children think. What they are good at is integrating disparate ideas to discover new ways of thinking about a topic, following an idea to its final conclusion, finding all the ways ideas intermesh with other known ideas, and seeing other possible ramifications than are usually seen. This type of thinking is illustrated in Nancy Kress's *Beggars in Spain* (1993, p. 204-209) when the most gifted children develop "strings" of ideas that connect together different ways of knowing something.

As science and technology are funded less for the purpose of gaining basic knowledge, and more to find immediate practical applications that are then patented and kept secret, the world of science will change. Unless there is a real change in the way we educate gifted children, they will fit right into the industrial/military complex whose parameters will determine what is done. The question of what will happen because something is done will be considered less often. Yet, there will continue to be good reasons why such questions need to be asked. One reason has to do with Chaos Theory and its premise that complex systems are inherently unstable (Gleick, 1987). This is apt to be ignored in a small domain focused on developing a particular product (the lesson of Jurassic Park). Another reason has to do with the loss of true giftedness when only short term benefits and technological parameters are considered.

We cannot predict what will happen when a product conceived in one context is placed in the hands of the world. Others will find different uses for it, often far from the original intention. This is what happened with Alfred Nobel's invention of dynamite. The Nobel Prizes were developed to try to compensate the world for the havoc created when dynamite was used in unforeseen ways. We owe it to gifted children to teach them to listen carefully to the messages of our do-it-because-you-can society and to ask creative and reflective questions about the applications of their ideas.

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PARENTING

Will My Child Be Accepted?

In my last column, I introduced John's mother who was seeking a school for her son, and I presented a list of 15 factors to look for in selecting a school for a gifted child. But finding a school is only the first step; the next hurdle is getting the child admitted to the school.

"Well," said John's mother, after she heard my list of prerequisites, "it looks like I have to embark on a research project of my own." But she seemed more encouraged. A few weeks later she called me rather discouraged.

"I found several schools which seemed to fit your description: a Montessori school, a small open private school, and an alternative public school."

I told her that it sounded promising and asked if they all had openings.

"The competition is fierce," she said. "Different schools have different entrance procedures. Some of them test, some want you to do different tasks. How do they make decisions? I am concerned about how John would react to each of them and how he would feel if he were turned down."

"You are absolutely right," I replied. "We are exposing many young children to enormous stress by having them go through all those admissions procedures. Unfortunately, many schools do not know that gifted children often react differently from other children to new situations. The schools can misinterpret them and may not predict correctly how they would adjust to the school. Sometimes a gifted child is turned away based on the interview."

"I know this is true in John's case," said his mother. "He does not enter a situation or even cooperate until he thoroughly understands it. He does not like answering questions if he does not know why they are being asked. He is often very shy in new situations."

"How is he once he becomes adjusted?" I inquired.

"Oh, he is a leader. He has so much information, so many new ideas. And he's a peacemaker!"

Those were my impressions also when I talked with John. This is why I use a totally different approach in my evaluation of children. I try to find out what their thoughts and interests are, rather than imposing my expectations on them. In this way, I actually find more answers to my questions, such as whether children are gifted, than when they must strain to please me with their answers.

I then said to John's mother: "I would like to suggest that you try not to expose John to too many interviews. Let him know that you won't be disappointed if he isn't accepted. It would also be a good idea to find out exactly how the interview is handled so that you can explain it to him. Also, tell the school how he reacts and that they need to know that his reticent behavior is no predictor of how he would eventually adjust. I believe he would be an asset to any school that would understand and value his careful but passionate way of learning and exploring."

This story has a good ending. John's mother found an administrator of a small private school who was receptive to her. Her information was included in the school's enrollment decision and he is now a contributing member of the school, even though from time to time, of course, certain difficulties arise. Parents of the gifted truly need to be careful but outspoken advocates when it comes to acquainting prospective schools with some of the ways in which their gifted child differs from others. Parents themselves need to see these differences as positive and convey this feeling to the school.

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life.*** Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a world-wide focus on global awareness in gifted education.

INSTRUCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Heterogeneous Grouping and the Gifted Student

The specter of heterogeneous grouping lurks on the educational horizon, ever present and ever menacing. It is touted as being "good for all students" and the democratic approach to education. The effects of such grouping on gifted students, however, frequently are harmful.

The term "tracking" sometimes is used synonymously with "ability grouping." The distinction between the terms is critical to a rational consideration of grouping. Tracking assigns students to a permanent position in the public school system. The track determines the curriculum—basic skills or college preparatory. Ability grouping is the temporary formation of student groups based on learning needs. Students move in and out of ability groups as their needs change.

A few years ago I taught Language Arts and Enriched Language Arts in a middle school. Based on my experiences, I identified some key issues related to grouping:

- ***instructional time***
- ***academic achievement***
- ***academic disillusionment***
- ***behavior/study skills.***

These issues may provide focus for the homogeneous grouping debate.

Student learning is related directly to time on task, or *instructional time*. Capable students complete lessons more quickly than average students, commonly 10-15 minutes more quickly. In a 52 minute period, if seven minutes are used for taking roll and giving directions, 45 minutes remain. If bright students have 10-15 minutes left after completing assignments, they are losing (or being deprived of) 22% to 33 1/3% of instructional time. The significance of this loss is apparent if it is projected—**it amounts to more than one day of every five!**

Time is also wasted for gifted students through oral reading. Many students in heterogeneous classes read far below grade level, necessitating oral reading of virtually everything. Efficient readers usually are engaged in something else during oral reading, periodically checking on the place, in case they are called on. In classes for the gifted, silent reading can be followed by thought-provoking discussions or writing assignments.

Curriculum and instruction for heterogeneous classes theoretically are aimed at the average student. In reality, textbooks and instruction are more appropriate for students of lower-than-average skill level. Gifted students endure year after year of instruction in (the same) low level skills. This may result in significantly lowered *academic achievement.*

Not surprisingly, bright students in mainstream classes suffer *academic disillusionment.* The surprise is those who remain motivated, even after figuring out that school is barely palatable, much less interesting or exciting.

These conditions result in *lowered academic skills* for many gifted students. Such low skill levels allow hostile educators to question the need for special classes or programs for the gifted, since "they have a lot to learn yet about basics."

Given the situations I have described — a bright mind, and a lively, often creative, spirit—children may develop behavior problems. Again, those hostile to ability grouping believe that "first they need to learn to behave; then we will talk about special 'privileges,'" such as an accelerated class.

The travesty of equal education for unequal needs continues, against all logic. So, too, continues the blight of lost instructional time, lowered academic achievement, academic disillusionment, and deficient study skills.

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Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

In April, newspaper columnist George Will wrote of the effect of television on American society, sharing the results of studies which showed conclusively that watching television, particularly in early childhood, increases the likelihood of violent behavior. We have known this informally for a long time, but the studies confirm it; importantly, the intelligence of the child does not affect the phenomenon.

Will pointed out that children have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality, and that television seems to them to present the world as it really is. What they see on the screen makes it clear that violence is the norm and that the way to survive in the world is to be as violent as everyone else.

On CBS's "Sunday Morning" the day after George Will's column appeared, John Leonard, discussing the difference between the way adults view television and the way children view it, pointed out that adults usually do other things while watching. Children, however, *attend*. They focus. They absorb what they see. We can ignore television, or slough it off; children learn from it—every minute.

For years, when speaking at children's literature conferences, I have said that the important thing about books is that unlike other forms of entertainment or communication, books can genuinely "share what it is to be human." Readers get inside a character's skin, thinking and feeling as the character thinks and feels. These two commentaries made that idea seem more important than ever.

Human beings are prisoners in their own skulls, knowing only themselves from the inside out. What they know of other people must be based on how those other people look, what they say, how they sound. In some senses we are locked away from others inevitably and forever, able to share only what they are willing to give.

Television and movies, composed of sight and sound, give us only the same outside look. The child who watches television and does not read does not get a sense of how other people feel and think, how others are like herself, individual human beings with hopes and dreams and fears and furies. Other people may seem to be merely objects, of greater or lesser importance to the child's isolated, feeling self.

The child who reads, on the other hand, encounters other people *from the inside*. Reading ***Bridge to Terabithia*** , a child lives with Jesse, feels his hopes and his fears, his deep caring, his frustrations, his anger, his loss and grief. And in living those feelings, the child recognizes his own, gets corroboration for his own, and understands that he is not the only one whose feelings count.

Humans are social animals, needing each other to live a full life. As our children grow, it is vital that they feel the connection between their own inmost realities and the inmost realities of other people. Literature provides that connection. In the findings of these new studies we have more reason than ever to turn off our television sets and give our children books.

Stephanie Tolan, M.A., from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

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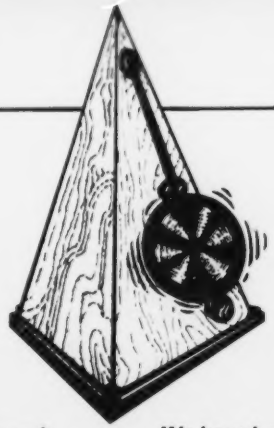

Pendulums & Paradigms

Pendulums and paradigms share a lot in common. For one, they both begin with "P". Also, they both shift over time, eventually returning to their respective points of origin. Another similarity is that both pendulums and paradigms are remarkably predictable; they retrace well-trod paths, and those observers with good memories can often recall the last time the pendulum or the paradigm swung their way.

Advocates of gifted child education are familiar with the cyclical nature of these two phenomena. Indeed, when gifted child educators meet to discuss new issues and trends, there is at least one "old timer" who inserts a dose of truth: "We did this 20 years ago—what's so new about it?"

Today, as gifted child education is once again under scrutiny by this year's crop of educational reformers, we are being asked to justify our existence. Questions like this prompt much discussion:

What proof do you have that gifted programs work?

How do you know that kids wouldn't have succeeded anyway, even if there weren't any gifted programs?

Why do we need to "pull kids out" of classes to provide enrichment? Wouldn't it make more sense to work with them inside their classrooms?

These questions are legitimate and important, yet in my 15 years of work in gifted child education, I have yet to hear them answered. Collectively, our field has "dodged the bullet" of accountability by stressing that such questions take time to answer, and that success can only be measured in the long term—a lifetime, perhaps.

Up until now, that long-range view of success has placated our critics. However, such is no longer the case. The pendulum is swinging outside of its usual orbit, and the entire field of gifted child education has been caught by surprise. For the first time in a long time, both the pendulum and the paradigm are shifting simultaneously, and our field's response has been ineffective and disjointed. In the eyes of our critics—and even some of our friends—we look pretty silly.

If gifted child education is to remain viable in the next decade, there are several postures we must assume:

1. We must begin to see gifted child education as an *idea* rather than a *place*. Currently, many educators believe that the resource room, self-contained class or honors seminar constitutes gifted child education. This doesn't say much to educators who work with gifted students each day in their "regular" classrooms, and it leaves our field out on a singular limb that is easily cut when budgets are slim.

2. We must rediscover the benefits of working with gifted students (and their teachers) within the confines of the classroom setting. By isolating our gifted child educators in pull-out classes, there is little chance for integrating our good ideas with those of our colleagues. We have been alone too long; it's time to go "back home."

3. We must embrace rather than denounce today's new paradigms of cooperative learning, inclusion, and outcome based education. Each of these ideas has much to offer highly able students, and if we are not "in the loop" of discussion about these trends, we will surely be left behind as these reform efforts take hold.

Change is uncomfortable; it is also inevitable. If the field of gifted child education is to have a continued impact on the lives of talented children, than it must be willing to shift with the times—and the paradigms.

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in their identification and selection procedures for gifted programs. Those who think of selection procedures in either context are already off the track. The students who should be in gifted programs are those whose mental abilities are advanced to the degree that the regular school program simply does not meet their needs; anything else is politics.

The students who should be in gifted programs are those whose mental abilities are advanced to the degree that the regular school program simply does not meet their needs; anything else is politics.

Those who think "exclusive" are aligned with the old-line gatekeepers who demanded that a student have an IQ of 132 to be declared "gifted" and therefore eligible for various rights and privileges. This view was not helpful to the highly able student who missed the magic cutoff but was well beyond the ability of his or her classmates and did require a differentiated program.

Those who think "inclusive" are usually from either the well-meaning set that always harbored secret guilt feelings about whether gifted programs fostered elitism, or from the cynical set that knew it would not be lucrative to market a model designed for a very limited population. We have never quite recovered from the inordinate time and money and effort lost in pursuing programs built on these misconceptions.

One of the earliest, and most extreme, of the inclusion models was Calvin Taylor's Talent Totem Pole Model (Taylor, 1968) which identified children in some half dozen areas including "wisdom," "planning," and "forecasting," and was built on the concept that if you tested children in enough areas, almost everyone could carry the label of "gifted" in something. As a diagnostic tool for the regular classroom teacher it may have been useful, but as a gifted program model it failed because it simply delayed meaningful program development.

A more seriously disturbing model, because of its popularity, is Joseph Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model with its concomitant triadic identification system. "Task commitment" is simply not a strong criterion for program entrance because motivating students is also part of a school's responsibility and good teachers do it all the time. "Creativity" may have relatively low relevance for a student whose intellectual needs are not being met in elementary school mathematics. And "above average ability" or 51st percentile aptitude compromises the credibility of the term "gifted" and contributes to the trivialization of serious gifted education.

The best one could do would be to scrap the irrelevant overlapping three circles of identification and implement the enrichment model for every student in the school. The model itself, with its various types of enrichment, and the way it can be scheduled into a school's program, is excellent and would probably be an asset to any school's program for students at all ability levels, including the gifted. The danger is in believing that part-time, "revolving-door," projects-based, resource-room type programs are comprehensive differentiated programs for the gifted.

Gifted program developers became interested in a different type of inclusion some years ago with the introduction of the concept of "multiple intelligences." Suddenly, there were new audiences to consider which might help to dispel accusations of serving an elite few. What seemed to be forgotten, however, was the fact that the "intelligences" related to traditional school tasks were not being at all well served in gifted programs.

Howard Gardner (1983) says on the opening page of his book, *Frames of Mind:* "...the score on an intelligence test does predict one's ability to handle school subjects, though it foretells little of success in later life" (p. 3).

That may well be, but for those of us who are employees of schools, it is in school subjects that we are expected to work, and it is in school subjects that parents of gifted children expect us to develop comprehensive and differentiated programs.

There are some signs of the "inclusion" concept in the recent trend to scrap the term "gifted" and replace it with the term "talented" and then direct efforts toward "talent development"—a sort of "create your own gifted child" model. The loss of the term "gifted" would probably cause little pain, but there is a problem in replacing it with the term "talented." The problem is no one seems to know what it means, or perhaps more accurately everyone seems to think it means something else. The lay opinion is that it has something to do with the arts; the school administrator's position seems to be that it is an ability level just a shade less than gifted; the gifted program practitioner's view seems to hold that it is a *specific* aptitude (in contrast to "giftedness," which is *general* intellectual ability). The most elegant view is held by Francoys Gagne (1991) of Quebec who hopes we will accept that talent is a human activity or *developed* abilities while giftedness is human aptitude or *natural* abilities. Even if everyone promised not to bicker about the definition, there would seem to be no point in jumping to a new term that has no universally accepted definition.

Many of these attempts at "inclusion" received their impetus from a desire to eliminate any hint of elitism; ironically, they were instrumental in making the case for legitimate charges of that very flaw. For in casting the net ever wider, many students were included in gifted programs who did not really require special programming since they were already sufficiently challenged in the regular school program. As the enthusiasm for inclusion spread, the program offerings that followed shifted further away from the major academic curriculum areas and it became questionable as to why any children should be excluded from these special offerings. In fact, this expanded group became the first true elitists in gifted education because there was no philosophical rationale for including only them. Their programs had become preferential rather than differentiated.

Relevance

When legislation for gifted education became popular in the 50's and 60's a major error was committed which will have implications for gifted programs to the year 2000. Eager to be recognized at all, gifted educators accepted the role of the gifted program as an "extra" in the larger context of schooling. Since full-time gifted programming in the major curricular areas was administratively difficult, even when the children required such services, program developers instead proposed "add-on" classes, summer programs, early morning or after school classes, resource room pull-outs, independent learning, and special projects. Some of these programs seemed to work rather well: the students enjoyed the change, the teachers liked working with a selected group, the parents were proud that their children had been identified as "gifted," and administrators were happy that the publicity was positive and the whole thing required few scheduling headaches.

But highly able students were still sitting in their regular fifth grade math classes agonizing over the slow pace of instruction while their less able peers struggled with their lessons, and precocious first graders who could read fluently with animation sat stunned while their classmates stood one at a time to read, haltingly, strings of isolated words. These same children were then collected once or twice a week and brought to a resource room where they could learn about dinosaurs or work on "brain-teasers" or write "what-if" exercises, or work in their critical thinking booklets.

The programs were neither substantive nor connected in any real sense to the full-time academic program of the school. Gifted programs became part-time and irrelevant, and they have continued in large part to grow that way to this day. We have become so hardened to this irrelevance that we can adopt an identification/program model entitled "Revolving Door" with a straight face and not the hint of embarrassment.

Early legislation on gifted education should have required gifted program interventions to *replace* the regular curriculum and involve differentiated curriculum in the major academic areas in which each student was identified as gifted. When the legislation did not so dictate, then gifted program administrators should have taken it upon themselves to do this anyway.

Cox, Daniel and Boston (1985) presented the findings of the Richardson Study, cautioning against the continuation of the popular pull-out model for meeting the needs of gifted students. The field would have done well to take that advice.

Differentiation

Probably the weakest structural support in the framework of gifted education is in the area of what has come to be called "differentiated education." Once the students have been selected by one means or another, and placed into one kind of educational setting or another, what exactly is to be done that is different, or differentiated, from what is done with regular ability students in regular classes?

Here educators of the gifted sailed all over the educational map, like Columbus—always confident but never in quite the right place. In the early years it was differentiation through creativity, and program developers worked at this so diligently that creativity exercises became almost synonymous with gifted programs. Always restless, the focus moved on like a tornado ripping through divergent thinking, problem solving, problem creating, thinking skills, critical thinking, learning styles, discovery learning, and shared inquiry. There was, it seemed, no end to what could be called differentiation for the gifted, but in truth not one of the strategies came even close, for every strategy that was temporarily embraced as the key to gifted differentiation was not only suitable, but *absolutely necessary*, for all students in all classes.

When the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* that had been categorized by Benjamin Bloom and his associates (1956) was loosed onto the field of gifted education, it seemed that the program developers had at last found their Grail. Noticing that knowledge, comprehension, and application were referred to as "lower levels," and analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as "higher levels," they reasoned naively that the "lower" levels had more to do with regular students and the "higher"

levels had more to do with gifted students. So they inverted the levels of the taxonomy so that gifted students would spend inordinate amounts of time analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating that about which they had little knowledge or comprehension. Gifted program consultants across the country became the worst offenders in offering this taxonomy as differentiation for the gifted.

Another interesting idea set forth concerning differentiation was that gifted education should emphasize product development where the child performs as does a practicing professional. Proponents of this idea contended that giftedness does not exist in a vacuum; it should be seen as linked to an observable end product. They also felt that gifted program activities should involve real life situations—working on community projects, writing actual letters rather than business letter exercises, producing actual radio programs, conducting actual interviews with senior citizens, etc. The five Type III enrichment goals that Renzulli (1977) considers uniquely appropriate for the gifted all deal with actual investigations of real problems, using raw data rather than reporting the conclusions of others, creating tangible products, and applying thinking processes to real situations rather than structured exercises.

The concept behind all of this seems to be that reality is only for the gifted. The major flaw in this view is that it is not only the gifted who do not exist in a vacuum. Every child, no matter what the ability level, should be involved with observable end products, and real life situations, and actual investigations, and raw data. It is elitist beyond belief to offer activities of this type as differentiated education for gifted children. The separation of activities into real vs. hypothetical for gifted and regular students is artificial; it would force gifted children into privileged roles, and it would withhold normal good teaching from regular ability students.

The latest fad in inservice workshops for differentiating curriculum for the gifted is to structure curriculum around major themes. Gifted program educators somehow got the notion that regular ability children should receive information in whatever way they always did, but gifted children should receive it grouped by "thematic threads" such as "challenge" or "conflict" or "patterns" or "exploration." There is not a scrap of evidence to indicate that this strategy has any more relevance for gifted students than it does for regular ability level students. In fact, if a person just wanted to be ornery, he or she could probably demonstrate that the thematic approach is better for regular ability level students since they might miss thematic connections unless these were pointed out, whereas the gifted child might more easily make such connections no matter how the material was presented. Actually, it is just as silly to advocate one as the other since thematic teaching is simply an excellent teaching strategy that can be used in the proper place and time with students of all ability levels. As all of these "differentiated" activities, once the private domain of the gifted program teacher, are seen for what they actually are—good teaching techniques for all students—they will cross over into the regular classroom, separate provisions for the gifted will seem redundant, the pendulum will swing more vigorously, and the framework of gifted education may come crashing down into an unfortunate heap.

> ***The differentiation is in pacing and depth only.***

We should have come to the conclusion by now that there is no curriculum per se, nor is there any method of teaching per se, that is suitable only for the gifted. The differentiation is in *pacing* and *depth* only. Gifted program classes should take on the same subject matter as the school's regular program. However, these classes should be accelerated—that is, go faster and introduce subjects earlier than the regular program, and they should be enriched—that is, go into far greater depth and intensity than in the regular program.

The litmus test for good gifted programming was publicized by Milton Gold (1965) who highlighted a quote from *The Gifted Student: A Manual for Program Development:*

> *An educational program can be devised which does more adequately meet the basic demands of the gifted child's greater learning capacity, and which on the whole being uniquely suited to the gifted is both unnecessary for and impossible of accomplishment by students of lesser ability.* (Southern Regional Project for the Education of the Gifted, 1962, cited in Gold, 1965, p.136)

Programs of the type that Gold envisioned can be developed if we ensure that the philosophical underpinnings to support the program are in place. This requires that:

1. *The students are identified as gifted through credible measures and it is clear that the child's educational needs would not be met in the regular classroom.*
2. *The gifted program parallels and is in place of the regular program.*
3. *The gifted program offerings are full time in the areas in which the student has been identified as gifted.*
4. *The gifted program groups gifted children full or part time with their*

(Continued on page 14)

There are questions deriving from *ethics*, such as, "Is it justifiable to provide certain forms of educational enrichment to some students, those labeled 'gifted,' and not to others, especially when the label 'gifted student' is applied disproportionately to upper middle class white students?" Additional questions derive from *axiology*, the study of values. Among these is one that has been a source of tension from the beginnings of our country's history, "To what extent, and with what consequences, do we, as a people, value excellence and egalitarianism, and to what extent are these values in conflict?" There are *epistemological* questions as well, questions having to do with knowledge, such as "What knowledge, what forms of knowledge, what organizations of knowledge are appropriate for gifted learners?" And there are basic questions of *ontology*, or existence, such as, "If a gifted program falls in a budget cut but there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?"

So the topic is a broad one, and I could use up some space, as I already have, by simply posing the question in various ways, making the question itself more complicated and the answer no clearer. In truth, this is part of what philosophers do, and, it seems to me, it is something well worth doing. And, I believe it is one of the things we ought to be encouraging gifted students to do: to take a question apart before answering it glibly, to look underneath and behind the question for a better question or series of questions, not simply beyond it for the answer. This is consistent with my belief that education, in part at least, is the process of making chaos out of order, of replacing certainty with doubt, of substituting questions for answers.

This seemingly anarchic, definitely postmodern view actually relates to the aspect of current philosophical thought that I want to discuss: the concept of postpositivism, defined below, a concept usually discussed in the context of the philosophy of science. It is relevant to much of what we do in the field of the education of the gifted because it challenges many of the basic ways we go about generating knowledge and much of the knowledge we use in our daily practice.

Positivism and Postpositivism

The field of the education of the gifted is not a discipline. It is a field of practice that depends on certain disciplines, traditionally psychology and the other social sciences, to generate a base of knowledge to inform our practical work with able students. For years, there has been a single paradigm, a single orientation to posing and answering questions, that has guided research and theory in such social sciences as psychology, and this is the paradigm known as *positivism*.

Positivism means different things to different people, but essential to it is the belief that what works in the so-called "hard sciences,"—physics, chemistry, and the like—should work equally well when the objects of study are human beings, their thinking and learning, and their social organizations. The predominance of this paradigm has led to a state of affairs in which scholarship is deemed to have merit to the degree that it is viewed as being "scientific." The scientific method has become *the* model for conducting inquiry in the social sciences.

There has, however, been a reaction against the application of the methods of the physical sciences to the study of human beings, and this involves more than a question of methods. For underlying the methods of positivism is a series of beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge, and other weighty matters that a number of individuals—philosophers, researchers, and others—have questioned. This has led to new approaches to studying and thinking about issues in education and the social sciences that are often subsumed under the heading "qualitative research." I prefer the more unwieldy term "postpositivist inquiry" since this reflects the fact that the new methods are based on a different set of axioms (basic beliefs) about people and their world from those that have guided positivist research.

What is the relevance of this to the education of gifted students? As I stated above, nearly all the knowledge upon which we base our understanding of gifted students and our efforts on their behalf rest on a positivist base. However, when we look at some of our most venerable questions, ideas, and practices from a postpositivist perspective, we start to see things in new ways, ways that have profound implications for educational practice.

Let me summarize briefly some of the fundamental differences between the traditional, positivist paradigm and what the philosopher D.C. Phillips (1987) calls "the new philosophy of science." I will try to point out how these basic philosophical differences affect research in psychology and education and also how they are beginning to affect how we conceive of giftedness in children and how we identify and educate gifted students.

Axiomatic Differences

Ontology: The Nature of Reality

A basic axiom of positivism is that there is a single objective reality "out there" that exists independent of our perception of it, an external reality that would exist whether we were here or not. The researcher's job, under the positivist paradigm, is to add to our accumulation of

knowledge about this reality, typically by studying a small component of it under controlled conditions and adding what is learned to the corpus of knowledge we have generated about the whole.

Postpositivists hold a radically different view: the belief that realities are multiple and constructed. This means that there is no single reality but many, each one being, in part, a product of an individual's experiences and the meanings he or she constructs out of these experiences. Post-positivists believe that each of us constructs a somewhat different reality, although in most cases there is significant overlap since we all live in a world with certain commonalities; physical objects, for example, do exist as tangible realities.

This is not as radical a notion as it may seem to be at first glance. It is simply another way of saying that my world is not exactly the same as your world because my experiences, beliefs, needs, and so forth are in some respects different from yours. I have come to understand existence and to construct meanings that help me negotiate my daily life in a manner that differs from the ways in which you do this. Thus, my reality is different from yours. The postpositivist inquirer (postpositivists do not like the term "researcher") thus sees his or her task not as one of adding to our accretion of knowledge about a single objective reality but of trying to understand other people's constructed realities and to recreate them through case studies that allow the reader to understand them.

What does this ontological stance have to do with giftedness? I would argue that the term "giftedness" is better understood and more easily reconciled with the way it is actually used in the schools from a postpositivist than from a positivist perspective. Giftedness is not a single objective thing that is "out there" in students. Instead, as the many definitions of giftedness that can be found in the literature and the variety of ways it is defined in the schools reveal, it is different things to different people. Moreover, each of these is a *social construction*, a concept whose meaning derives from what people in a given setting, such as a school district, agree that it means.

To take a common example, it is not rare for a child "to be gifted" in one school district but "not to be gifted" in another, simply because the two districts define "giftedness" differently. Put another way, each district constructs a different reality around the term "gifted student." From a positivist perspective, one or both of these districts are in error and stray from the truth about giftedness. From a postpositivist perspective, both are constructing realities that attempt to fit their situations and the needs of their students well. In fact, I have argued that this is exactly what school districts ought to do when they develop programs for gifted students (Borland, 1989).

Giftedness is not a single objective thing that is "out there" in students. Instead. . . it is different things to different people.

Generalization

Positivist researchers typically study a relatively small number of subjects (for example, 166 seventh grade mathematics students reported in a manuscript submitted to the *American Educational Research Journal* that I put aside before resuming work on this paper) with one overriding goal: to learn something about the sample that can be generalized to the entire population the sample represents (e.g., all seventh grade mathematics students). The only justification for studying the few is to derive *nomothetic laws*, generalizations that hold for all people in all places, or at least those represented by the sample.

Postpositivists will have nothing to do with this. They believe that generalization is almost always impossible because no two settings, no two realities, are sufficiently alike to allow us to map what is true about one setting onto the reality of another. Anything that is general enough to apply to everybody everywhere, they argue, is so drained of specificity as to be meaningless. Thus, they strive for *idiographic interpretation*, accounts of specific settings that contain "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of the specifics of individual lives. The inquirer has no obligation to generalize what he or she learns. Rather, he or she must describe the realities in credible detail so that the reader can, if appropriate, transfer what is learned to his or her reality. The responsibility for transfer is the consumer's, not the producer's.

What do limits on generalization suggest for our field? For one thing, they call into question the universality of general models of programming, curriculum, and instruction. A postpositivist would argue that no single way of educating gifted students can work in all settings because each setting is unique in significant ways. Just as there is no single reality in which the term "gifted student" has universal meaning, there can be no one "best" way of providing educational services for students defined in various ways in various settings as gifted.

Objectivity

Positivists strive for objectivity in their research; indeed, "objective" has

become nearly synonymous with "scientific" which has become synonymous with "good" or "valid" in educational research. This means that researchers should keep their values and beliefs out of their research and that they can do this, human though they are, through the application of "objective methods." Moreover, positivists take pains to observe or test without affecting or changing what they study through the use of "nonreactive" measures and methods.

"Nonsense," says the postpositivist, who argues that no human activity, including scientific inquiry, is objective. Our values always creep into our work. The only valid question is whether we are going to make them covert, and thus not subject to evaluation by the consumer of research, by pretending that we are objective or whether we are going to make our subjectivity explicit, and thus open to examination. Furthermore, we need to acknowledge that when we study something, we are affecting it in some way. As the physicist Werner Heisenberg wrote, "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning" (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 98).

No single way of educating gifted students can work in all settings because each setting is unique in significant ways.

Again, what does this mean for our field? One thing it suggests is that we ought to give up our insistence on "objective" means of identification and our overdependence on tests. Advocates for school reform and restructuring frequently argue for "authentic assessment," something to which we ought to pay attention in this field, for it is quite possible that objective methods are not always the most valid.

We are currently working on something called Project Synergy here at Teachers College. This is a federally funded project designed, among other things, to develop ways of identifying potentially gifted young children in urban schools that serve economically disadvantaged, mostly minority, students. Are we trying to develop objective identification procedures? No, we are simply trying to develop valid and effective ones. Thus, we rely heavily on observation, portfolios, dynamic assessment, and consensual assessment (Amabile, 1983). This is now in the mainstream in most fields of education, but not in ours.

Given that we are trying to assess a construct, giftedness, that is itself subjective and socially constructed, we believe that methods that are purported to be objective are not sufficient in and of themselves (they are useful as *part* of an identification process, of course). We believe that subjective, fallible, but adaptable human beings, what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as the "human instrument," ought to play a greater role than tests do in gathering identification data. Moreover, we believe that the identification of gifted students ought to be a process whereby a group of educators, acting on a case-by-case basis with their eyes open, makes a human decision about the logic of a placement for a given student in light of all the information, "objective" and otherwise, that is available about that student.

This brief discussion does not touch upon all of the axiomatic differences between positivism and postpositivism, and it only begins to trace the implications of postpositivism for practice in the field of the gifted. Furthermore, I have not discussed the ways in which postpositivist inquiry differs from positivist research with respect to method, for example in letting the design of inquiry emerge as one goes along; in allowing theory to develop grounded in the findings as they accrue, instead of positing or testing a theory *a priori*; in sampling purposefully, not randomly; in stressing qualitative, not quantitative, data; and so forth. The reader is referred to a more detailed treatment of these issues by this author elsewhere (Borland, 1990). However, I hope this gives the reader unfamiliar with these issues some understanding of how profoundly different these two orientations really are, not just to research but to the world itself.

Implications for Education

Is this at all significant? Does it have much to do with anything other that what academics talk about when they get together at conferences? Does it in any way affect real kids in real schools? In a word, yes. As a field of practice, we base much of what we do on what has been discovered through research on people and the ways they think and learn. Theories and research knowledge are, in a sense, the raw materials from which we fashion our practice. Any fundamental shift in the way scholars conceptualize the meaning of, and the processes whereby they generate, theories and research knowledge will therefore have profound implications for our work with children.

Consider, for example, a relatively minor deviation from the traditional way of viewing things. I am referring here to Howard Gardner's (1983) notion of multiple intelligences, the idea that there are seven distinct human intelligences of diverse natures and equal value, most of which bear little resemblance to conventional

GIFTEDNESS AND "THE NEW PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE" Continued from page 13

conceptions of intelligence. There are now federally funded programs for gifted students in which giftedness is defined in terms of these separate intelligences. Moreover, in these programs, consistent with Gardner's theory, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence are treated as the equals of verbal intelligence and logical-mathematical intelligence, as are the forms of giftedness that derive from these intelligences.

This is a rather radical departure from business as usual in this field, although results from a theory that, in its basic orientation, is not very far outside the mainstream at all. Consider, then, the possible implications for practice of a complete reorientation of our idea of what constitutes research, let alone of what constitutes reality. This is just what is happening in psychological and educational inquiry today; postpositivist inquiry is increasingly employed to pursue basic questions relevant to the educational enterprise.

Like it or not, we now live in a postpositivist, postmodern age. For many thinkers, at least, relativism has replaced absolutism, contingency has replaced certainty. It may no longer make sense to search for "the truth" about what giftedness "really is" or what is the "best way" to educate gifted students. If the postpositivists are right, there may be many right answers simply because there are many realities currently being constructed by educators, children, and families. This may force a major change in the way we view our field and in the ways in which we try to meet the needs of gifted students. And if contemporary philosophy can help us understand this and can help scholars generate useful information that can be translated into educational practice, then we will have one response to the chronic question about philosophy, "What practical value does it have?"

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RE-EXAMINING THE FOUNDATIONS OF GIFTEDNESS Continued from page 10

intellectual peers in accordance with the field research on grouping (Rogers, 1991).

5. *The enrichment differentiation for gifted programs is focused on the degree of difficulty of the material and on the curriculum being studied in greater depth.*

6. *The acceleration differentiation for gifted programs is focused on the faster pace of classroom instruction and on the earlier introduction of various subject matter into the curriculum.*

With gifted education suffering both threats from outside the field and weaknesses from within, we need to make some substantive changes in the way we view the education of gifted children. We must become more questioning of each model that is suggested as a provision for the gifted; we must develop a healthy skepticism of the "quick-fix" program designs that have proliferated in this field; and finally, we must require every workshop consultant, every conference presenter, every journal contributor to distinguish more carefully between that which is good teaching for all students and that which Gold (1965) reminds us is, *"uniquely suited to the gifted [and] is both unnecessary for and impossible of accomplishment by students of lesser ability"* (p. 136).

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Martha J. Morelock

Imposing Order on Chaos

A Theoretical Lexicon

The most critical issue in the field of giftedness today is a controversy over conceptualization. It manifests itself in a single implied question underlying every talk given, every program planned, every research study designed, and every judgment made as to whether a child is eligible for special programming. The implied question takes an "Either-Or" form and can be expressed in something like the following way: **Who** are "the gifted"? **Either** "the gifted" are a group of individuals having special needs and eligible for special services by virtue of being generally different in mode and advanced in pace of learning; **or** "the gifted" are those whose achievement/performance in a particular area demonstrates creative productivity, and who are therefore eligible for special services on the basis that they deserve to have their talents developed. Each of these stances has spawned its own theory, research, and curricular innovations. Indeed, they are beginning more and more to look like two separate strands of research and practice. We might label them (1) "The gifted child strand" and (2) "the gifted achiever strand."

Related to this conflict in perspective is the lack of standardly accepted terminology in the field. As Ronvik notes in his article in this issue, the acknowledged problems associated with sorting out the denotations and connotations of the word "gifted" have even led some to recommend that the field abandon the word altogether.

In brief, then, the field of giftedness today is one which (1) cannot agree on its proper focus, and (2) does not have a standardized terminology with which to discuss its focus even if it could agree on one. This certainly does not bode well for the educational futures of the children we wish to serve (whoever they may be!).

Is there any way to resolve this schism? I suggest that both strands of research and practice are valid and valuable, and that the field **must** continue to encompass both. To facilitate this, I am proposing a new lexicon for the field of giftedness along with the synthesizing framework which it represents. It is presented here in a skeletal and preliminary form—to be elaborated elsewhere in future writings.

A Theoretical Lexicon

In recent years, researchers and theorists in the "gifted achiever strand" have advocated thinking in terms of identifying and facilitating talent in a variety of distinct achievement areas. This is in recognition of the growing body of research suggesting that extraordinary achievement is, in actuality, a matter of possessing the right constellation of specific skills and personality characteristics required for superior performance in a particular field. While the complex of skills and personality characterics necessary for superior performance in a particular field—or a particular level of success in that field—**may** include extraordinary abstract reasoning (a central aspect of giftedness as traditionally conceived), this may not always be the case.

Meanwhile, from "the gifted child strand," accumulating evidence revealing the extent of significant developmental differences between gifted children (i.e., children demonstrating advanced abstract reasoning abilities) and their more average counterparts has resulted in a new view of giftedness (Columbus Group, 1991). Gifted development, according to this view, is inherently "asynchronous," meaning that a child's rates of cognitive, physical, and emotional development are out of sync with one another. This strand has called for an increased emphasis on the qualitatively different life experience and awareness resulting from this asynchrony and the heightened intensity generally accompanying it. Concomitantly, a plea is entered for the de-emphasis of behaviors or achievements external to the individual (Morelock, 1992).

Based on these developments in the two strands, the following two-pronged approach for the field of giftedness is proposed: (1) the term *"talent"* be used to refer to the potential for superior achievement in a particular field; whereas (2) the term *"gifted"* be reclaimed to refer to a particular pattern of asynchronous development in childhood. This places the gifted child in a special needs category with children exhibiting other forms of asynchronous development (e.g., mental retardation, where cognitive development lags behind physical development). In this framework, giftedness does **not** imply promise of superior achievement/performance. Conversely, superior achievement/performance does **not** automatically imply the presence of giftedness. More specific definitions follow below:

Giftedness: **when a child's cognitive abilities are advanced beyond normal expectations for his or her chronological age.** Characteristically, these advanced cognitive abilities combine with a heightened intensity to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively

(Continued on page 16)

different from the norm. The asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity (Columbus Group, 1991). Giftedness implies an advanced ability to construct meaning in the context of experience, including an enhanced capacity to think abstractly and to respond emotionally to abstract concepts used in the interpretation of experiential phenomena. Giftedness permeates the whole of one's intellectual, social and emotional reality.

***Talent:* the potential for superior achievement/ performance in some specific field of endeavor.** It includes those cognitive, psychomotor, sensorial, emotional, social, and motivational characteristics which are required for success in a particular field of endeavor at a particular point in time. Talent only becomes apparent when an individual becomes engaged in an activity providing for the expression of potential in a manner compatible with the demands of a particular area of achievement. It is a manifestation of the interaction between individual and activity, and cannot exist separate from either.

***Superior Achievement/Performance:* achievement or performance in a field of endeavor which is superior to that of most others comprising one's peer group.** The phenomenon of "superior achievement" develops through the interaction over time between an individual with certain biologically-based capabilities and a culturally constructed opportunity for expression which is particularly compatible with those biologically-based capabilities (e.g., accomplished pianists could not exist without the invention of the piano) (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1986; Feldman with Benjamin, 1986) . Superior achievement/ performance is activity-based, and measurable in terms of the excellence of performance or product.

Conclusion

The new lexicon provides standardized nomenclature which would allow researchers and theorists involved in disparate parts of the field to communicate clearly and amicably with each other. I believe a clear valuing of both strands of thought and research, with precise terminology for labeling aspects of each strand is vital. In Borland's article in this issue it is suggested that multiple definitions of "giftedness" should be acceptable, recognizing that each construct is appropriate within its own context. This would seem to relate more to the concept of talent than to that of giftedness in the sense of asynchronous development. Within the framework presented here, it would make about as much sense to say that giftedness is "socially constructed" as to say that mental retardation is "socially constructed." Ronvik's view is more consistent with the concept of giftedness presented in this lexicon, although his primary focus is still on achievement.

Gifted children **must** remain a priority focus for research and study in the field. Unless these children have their giftedness recognized and the fundamental needs emerging from it met, they are unlikely to either reveal or develop their talents, and they are likely to be emotionally damaged in school systems where they are misunderstood. Thus, even if the field seriously decided to commit itself solely to "talent development for all children," it logically would be forced by that very definition to devise differential strategies for this sub-population of children based on the unique requirements of their giftedness. To erase the term "gifted" from the field would amount to a legitimatized denial of the existence of one whole group of children with special needs. It would represent discrimination of the most heinous sort, given their documented special needs and the established right of all children to an appropriate education.

Within the framework presented here, the two phenomena of giftedness and talent would together comprise the proper area for research, study, and educational innovation covered by our field. The framework is built on the contributions of many in both strands of the field. It is offered as a way of clearing up the confusion and healing the rift with which our field is afflicted. Hopefully, we can then begin to more profitably work together towards our shared goal of meeting the needs of all gifted and talented children.

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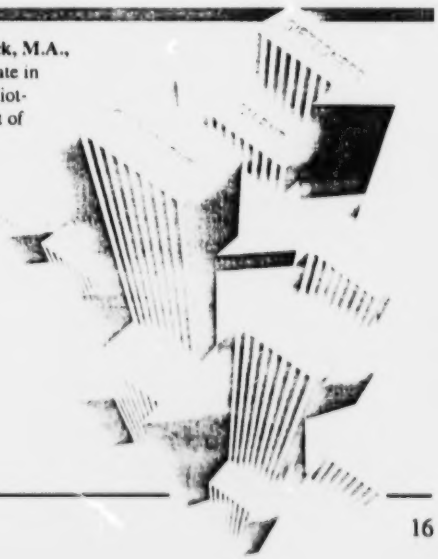

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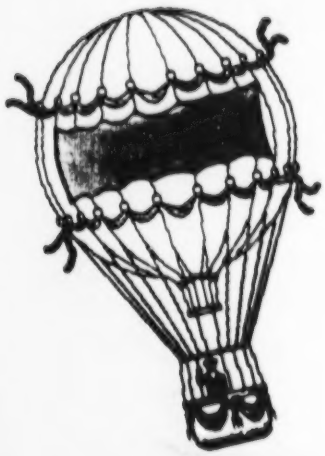

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Creative Dramatics, Part III
Improvisations

*In Part II, we went on an **Environmental Walk** and learned about **Pantomime**. Students can creatively build upon the dramatic skills developed in pantomime and move on to **Improvisations** which add dialogue to movement in creative dramatics.*

The key to ***Improvisation*** is creativity and not memorization of lines. The dialogue flows naturally out of the characterizations students create and role play and the situations the student dramatists create. Imagination and problem solving flourish when students are provided a few words or objects as stimuli and are directed to improvise their own original short, nonscripted plays. To actively involve students in improvisations at least three different approaches work well. First, list four or five words on the chalkboard or overhead. Words (and phrases) chosen might include: *blue, clown, laughter, fire, truck, necklace.* Divide the class into several groups of four or five. Assign each group the task of creating and acting out a story that revolves around the cue words provided.

Another approach is to give each group of two to five students three to six real objects that they must utilize in an improvisation. In this case no two groups have the same objects. The props provided may include colorful old clothes and hats, costume jewelry, ordinary kitchen utensils, school supplies such as rulers or crayons, books, art objects, and other items to rummage through and keep on hand in their magic box of props. The props are magical because they can be used in so many different ways.

Character Improvisation provides still another approach to creative dramatics. Ask each student to create a character. The character may be of any age, background, profession, or situation. Examples: a modern, inner-city youth; a highly successful businesswoman; an aspiring actor or actress. Students create dossiers or scrapbooks of words and pictures that reveal the identity of their characters. Since students are inventing the characters, each is free to invent all dossier information. Each dossier contains many pictures of the invented character (photos cut from magazines, or more creatively, drawings done by the student.) The pictures may show the character at different ages, engaged in different hobbies, or reveal the character through his or her car, favorite room, favorite vacation locale, etc. Information in the dossier also provides relevant data about the character's traits, likes, dislikes, manner of speech, way of walking, personal quirks, family, and work or role in society.

When the scrapbooks are completed, place students in groups of four or five, and direct them to introduce their characters and share their dossiers or scrapbooks. Finally, each team or group should create an improvised drama to share with their classmates that involve all the characters created by members of the group. The dramatization of each group should be followed by sharing with the whole class the creative thoughts and problem solving steps the group utilized in designing their improvisation.

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of several books, including *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors.*

Mary Lynn Baum

from parent to parent

In over ten years of advocacy on behalf of gifted children, I've seen changes—both good and bad—as awareness grows and socio-educational theories shift. I've often commented that this enterprise is the chipping away at a granite wall with a toothpick!

Even as we push for services and debate what they should look like, however, there is an important constant. No matter what happens (or doesn't happen) for gifted kids in school, the role of parents in supporting their children is essential—arguably the most important factor in gifted children's success. While we should never give up the fight for more appropriate educational services, we must not get so absorbed in that struggle that we focus all our attention on it and fail to recognize the strengths and the responsibilities that lie within ourselves.

What follows is a somewhat schematic way of thinking about how we can provide **SUPPORT** to our gifted children:

S—*Self understanding and self-acceptance.* The more we can help our children understand the nature of their giftedness, the better able they will be to take pleasure in their own talents and to cope with the stresses that inevitably come from being different. (It hardly needs saying that we first need to understand and accept their differentness ourselves!)

U—*Unconditional love.* Our children need to know that we love them, not for their abilities, but for themselves—that our love for them is not dependent on their talents.

P—*Peers.* Because our children may be isolated within their school setting, they need our support—and practical assistance—to spend time with others who share their interests and abilities.

That means searching our community for activities which may appeal to gifted children or being willing to drive across town to play with a new-found friend. We parents also need to find peers with whom we can share both the joys and the difficulties of living with a gifted child.

P—*Passions.* We need to help our children pursue their passions, whether that means facilitating a relationship with the local children's librarian, helping a small geographer trace and cut out pieces for a map-puzzle, or planning a family vacation to a paleontology museum rather than the seashore.

O—*Ourselves* ... as mentors, as advocates, as confidants; as arbiters of values, as their greatest fans, and as people in our own right, with interests and passions of our own.

R—*Resources.* We can help them be aware of and use the myriad resources within our communities: libraries, school and extracurricular programs, mentors, etc.

T—*Testimony.* Ultimately we all have to be prepared to bear witness to our children's abilities and to advocate on their behalf. Two other "T's" are essential for this task: *Tact* and *Tenacity*!

Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

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Current Developments in Gifted Education

...A 19th century physician who found himself in a modern hospital would be completely lost. Setting, instrumentation, diagnosis and technique all would be utterly baffling.

A 19th century teacher plunked down in a late 20th century classroom would be right at home. (Raspberry, 1993, p.7B)

This statement is unsettling because: 1) Education is accused of being shockingly resistant to change; 2) the general perception of education is negative; and 3) the accusation may just be true.

During the last decade emphasis has been on restructuring schools so that students would be prepared for a future of technology. School reform became the magic plan intended to solve the ills of education in time for the advent of the information age. Educational buzzwords included untracking, cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping, middle school—all concepts that have not proven to be successful for gifted students.

The technological age is no longer the future. The 21st century will arrive before most of our current elementary pupils have left the school system. I doubt that all students are prepared to live in this vast information age, and I'm certain that many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in it.

A recent letter from a classroom teacher praised us for being among the few leaders in gifted education who are "not rowing with the reform tide." She expressed concern that the assumption that teachers can meet the needs of gifted learners in heterogeneous classrooms, an important element of school reform, is "*not* grounded in reality."

I might be less cynical about the results of school reform if it weren't for frequent complaints from parents of gifted children. One father exclaimed, "I can't believe that in this progressive school system of 25,000 students, there isn't one science class that can challenge my third grader!" Frustrated parents are turning to homeschooling and private education so that their gifted children can experience the excitement of learning, rather than the turn-off of mass education that isn't working for their accelerated learners.

Some educators express the belief that we in gifted education need to embrace the principles of school reform or we will be left behind. Gifted child educators have long advocated for alternatives in education: ungraded classes, honors and advanced placement classes, acceleration, independent study, ability grouping, meeting individual needs in the regular classroom, etc.We're the ones who have led the way in proposing change. We've only resisted change when it may hurt kids.

Fourteen years ago, Martha C. Burroughs (1979) stated: "What safer method than to 'develop the potential of the gifted' in a way that involves no visible action..., but sounds tremendously impressive? No one will see through the pretense—no one will want to see through it—except gifted children and their parents. And they are a small minority of the people the educator must please" (p.26).

Could she have been referring to school reform in the 90's?

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The Gifted Child Society, a non-profit organization headed by veteran parent advocate Gina Ginsberg Riggs, has developed the only information hotline specifically for parents of gifted children. This live-response 900 number will be staffed weekdays 9-4 EST starting September 1st. Cost: $3 for the first minute and $2 each additional minute. CALL 1-900-773-PING!

IOWA TALENTED AND GIFTED ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

October 17-19, 1993. The Iowa Talented and Gifted Association is sponsoring its 21st annual conference on the theme, "Touch the Future: Three Dimensions of Tomorrow." Conference site: University of Iowa, Memorial Union, Iowa City, IA. For information, contact: Fred Johnson, Arrowhead AEA, 1235 5th Avenue South, Fort Dodge, IA 50501. 1-800-234-2183. FAX: 515-576-4743.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN 40TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION

November 3-7, 1993. The 40th Annual NAGC Convention will be held at the Westin Peachtree Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia. Division Meetings are scheduled from 8:00 to 10:00 AM on Wednesday, November 3rd. Please plan to come early so that you can lend your energy to the Division of your choice (e.g., Global Awareness, Parent & Community, Counseling, Creativity, etc.). Early registration deadline October 1, 1993. Contact NAGC, 1155 15th Street, NW, Suite 1002, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 785-4268.

ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT: A JOURNAL ON ADULT GIFTEDNESS

The first journal on adult giftedness, *Advanced Development* focuses on inner development rather than achievement. Volume 5, "Valuing the Feminine," features the Stone Center's Self-in-Relation Theory. Leta Hollingworth is the moral exemplar. Issues important for both men and women are raised. ($20 for individuals; $30 for institutions.) See the order form on page 18 or contact ISAD, 1452 Marion Street, Denver, CO 80218, (303) 837-8378.

NEXT ISSUE

FOCUS:
VALUING PARENTS

"Pushy and Domineering": A Stigma Placed on Parents of Gifted Children
Lynn Cole, Ph.D. & Roxana DellaVecchia

Educating Educators
Cathy Silva

I AM NOT BOUND TO WIN

I am not bound to win,
But I am bound to be true.
I am not bound to succeed,
But I am bound to live up to what light I have.
I must stand with anybody that stands right;
Stand with him while he's right,
And part with him when he goes wrong.

Abraham Lincoln

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